



# G A N D H I J I

AS WE KNOW HIM

*by*

SEVENTEEN CONTRIBUTORS

*Edited by*

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*with a Foreword by*

SAROJINI NAIDU



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## FOREWORD

Inevitably, as with all world-famous figures, there has sprung up around the name and personality of Mahatma Gandhi a vast and varied literature in many tongues, where fact and fable, authentic history and romantic legend are so entangled that even the wariest foot might sometimes slip in the thick labyrinth of words. But Shri Chandrashanker Shukla has safely brought back for us a few green leaves of tribute by a few men and women, who have in vivid and merry fashion recorded their personal response to the infinite charm and greatness of Gandhi, India's man of Destiny, in whose august presence strong men bow their heads in awe and in whose lap little children play without fear.

No word from me is required to commend this delightful little symposium of homage whose title itself must quicken the curiosity and interest of a wide and eager circle of readers.

I should have been so happy to add a postscript to these pages, had I at my service a vocabulary of sufficient grace and beauty and power, to convey, if not adequately at least approximately, my own response to the Gandhi that I know. But which of us, even amongst those who

are nearest to him, can truly appraise the glory of the man, so richly endowed with the loftiest and loveliest qualities of the human mind and spirit—an exquisite courtesy of heart, a wisdom that is at once profound and luminous, an unconquerable courage, an incorruptible faith, a surpassing love of suffering and erring humanity, and, most rare and precious of gifts, his humour which is an integral and inalienable part of his wisdom and courage and compassion?

He has often been likened to Buddha and to Christ. But we cannot measure a man's real greatness by any standard of comparisons. It is enough for us that he is Gandhi who in his own right assumes an equal place among the supreme teachers of mankind.

4th October, 1945  
*Hyderabad (Deccan)*

SAROJINI NAIDU

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

"This, then, seems to me to be the significant fact about Gandhiji. Great as he is as a politician, as an organiser, as a leader of man, as a moral reformer, he is greater than all these as a man, because none of these aspects and activities limits his humanity. This man seems greater than his virtues, great as they are."

Thus said Tagore in the course of an article published seven years ago, entitled "Gandhi—the Man". It is 'Gandhi—the Man' which the articles reproduced in the following pages purport to depict. They contain the reactions to Gandhiji's personality by some of his most distinguished contemporaries, published on different occasions during the last 38 years. The collection, it is hoped, will meet with long-felt need, and will be read with interest by students of his life and work as also by the large reading public who have had no occasion to come into close contact with him.

I take this opportunity to express my indebtedness to all the authors and publishers who have granted me permission to reproduce some of the articles in this book, and particularly to Shrimati Sarojinidevi for the 'Foreword' which she has been kind enough to contribute.

Bombay,  
10th October 1945

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# THE MAN HIMSELF

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JOSEPH J. DOKE

It was late in December, 1907, when I saw Mr. Gandhi for the first time. Rumour had been very busy with his name. The Passive Resistance movement had come into prominence. Some small stir had been made in the newspapers by the imprisonment of a Pandit, and in one way or another Mr. Gandhi's name had been bandied from lip to lip. One evening a friend raised the Asiatic Question at the supper-table, and, as we were comparatively new to Johannesburg, although not new to the country, he told us what he thought of the Indians. His account was so strange and so completely opposed to all our previous experience, that it made us curious, and more than anything else decided me to interview the leader.

The office, at the corner of Rissik and Anderson Streets, I found to be like other offices. It was intended for work and not for show. The windows and door were adorned with the name of the occupant with the denomination of Attorney attached to it. The first room was given up to a lady typist, the second, into which I was ushered, was the *sanctum sanctorum*. It was meagrely furnished and dusty. A few pictures were scattered along the walls. They were chiefly photographs of no great merit. The Indian Stretcher-

bearer Corps was in evidence—photographs of Mrs Besant, Sir William Wilson Hunter, and Justice Ranade—several separate Indian portraits—and a beautiful picture of Jesus Christ. Some indifferent chairs, and shelves filled with law books completed the inventory.

All this I confess to have noted afterwards. Just then, my whole attention was centred in the man who greeted me, and in an effort to readjust my ideas to unexpected experiences. Having travelled in India, I had almost unconsciously selected some typical face and form as likely to confront me, probably a tall and stately figure, and a bold, masterful face, in harmony with the influence which he seemed to exert in Johannesburg. Perhaps a bearing haughty and aggressive. Instead of this, to my surprise, a small, lithe, spare figure stood before me, and a refined earnest face looked into mine. The skin was dark, the eyes dark, but the smile which lighted up the face, and that direct fearless glance, simply took one's heart by storm. I judged him to be of some thirtyeight years of age, which proved correct. But the strain of his work showed its traces in the sprinkling of silver hairs on his head. He spoke English perfectly, and was evidently a man of great culture.

Asking me to be seated, he listened to an explanation of my visit, noting the points raised with a nod of the head, and a quick 'yes', until I had done. Then he went straight to the mark. Using his fingers to

emphasize his thoughts, he gave the most luminous statement of the Asiatic position, in a few crisp sentences, that I have ever heard. I was anxious to know what the religious elements in the struggle were, and he gave them with convincing clearness, explaining patiently every little involved issue, and satisfying himself that I understood each before dealing with the next. Once, when he paused longer than usual, to see whether I had grasped the thought or had only assented for the sake of courtesy, I closed my note-book, thinking he had finished. "Don't close it," he said, "the chief point is yet to come."

There was a quiet assured strength about him, a greatness of heart, a transparent honesty, that attracted me at once to the Indian leader. We parted friends.

When I think of him now, one or two scenes stand out more vividly than others.

There is the trial in the 'B' Criminal Court, a great mass of excited Asiatics crushed in at the door, and spreading to a great crowd outside. The cynical Magistrate, with his face flushed, presiding at the Bench, the horseshoe of legal offices below.

Then I can see again that spare, lithe form responding to the call, "Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi" and taking the prisoner's place with alacrity to receive a sentence of "two months' imprisonment" for the sake of his suffering people. Just prior to this, he had addressed these words to the hundreds of Asiatics who

had gathered at the Mosque . "No matter what may be said, I will always repeat that it is a struggle for religious liberty. By religion I do not mean formal religion, or customary religion, but that religion which underlies all religions, which brings us face to face with our Maker. If you cease to be men, if, on taking a deliberate vow, you break that vow in order that you may remain in the transvaal without physical inconvenience, you undoubtedly forsake God To repeat again the words of the Jew of Nazareth, those who would follow God have to leave the world; and I call upon my countrymen, in this particular instance' to leave the world and cling to God, as a child clings to its mother's breast" Notable and brave words.

Another scene recurs to my mind with equal vividness. The Pathans had attacked him, striking him down and beating him with savage brutality. When he recovered consciousness, he was lying in an office near by to which he had been carried. I saw him a moment later. He was helpless and bleeding, the doctor was cleansing his wounds, the police officers watching and listening beside him, while he was using what little strength he had to insist that no action should be taken to punish his would-be murderers "They thought they were doing right," he said, "and I have no desire to prosecute them " They were punished, but Mr Gandhi took no part in it

These are scenes one can never forget, they serve to reveal the man Our Indian friend lives on a

higher plane than most men do His actions, like the actions of Mary of Bethany, are often counted eccentric, and not infrequently misunderstood Those who do not know him think there is some unworthy motive behind, some Oriental 'slime', to account for such profound unworldliness But those who know him well are ashamed of themselves in his presence

Money, I think, has no charm for him His compatriots are angry, they say "He will take nothing The money we gave him when he went as our deputy to England he brought back to us again The presents we made him in Natal, he handed over to our public funds He is poor because he will be poor "

They wonder at him, grow angry at his strange unselfishness, and love him with the love of pride and trust He is one of those outstanding characters, with whom to walk is a liberal education, whom to know is to love \*

( 1908 )

\* Reproduced from *M K Gandhi* by J J Doke, by courtesy of the publishers, Messrs G A Natesan & Co Madras.

# A MAN AMONG MEN

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GOPAL KRISHNA GOKHALE

## I

Fellow-Delegates, after the immortal part which Mr Gandhi has played in this affair I must say it will not be possible for any Indian, at any time, here or in any other assembly of Indians, to mention his name without deep emotion and pride (here the huge gathering rose to its feet and accorded three hearty and most enthusiastic cheers to Mr Gandhi) Gentlemen, it is one of the privileges of my life that I know Mr Gandhi intimately, and I can tell you that a purer, a nobler, a braver and a more exalted spirit has never moved on this earth (cheers and loud applause) Mr Gandhi is one of those men who, living an austere simple life themselves and devoted to all the highest principles of love to their fellow beings and to truth and justice, touch the eyes of the weaker brethren as with magic and give them a new vision. He is a man who may be well described as a man among men, a hero among heroes, a patriot among patriots, and we may well say that in him Indian humanity at the present time has reached its high water mark \*

\* From a speech delivered at the Lahore session of the Congress in 1909

## II

My second observation will be about my dear and illustrious friend Mr Gandhi. Ladies and gentlemen, only those who have come in personal contact with Mr Gandhi as he is now, can realize the wonderful personality of the man. He is without doubt made of the stuff of which heroes and martyrs are made. Nay more. He has in him the marvellous spiritual power to turn ordinary men around him into heroes and martyrs. During the recent passive resistance struggle in the Transvaal—would you believe it?—twentyseven hundred sentences of imprisonment were borne by our countrymen there under Mr Gandhi's guidance to uphold the honour of their country. Some of the men among them were very substantial persons, some were small traders, but the bulk of them were poor humble individuals, hawkers, working men and so forth, men without education, men not accustomed in their life to think or talk of their country. And yet these men braved the horrors of jail life in the Transvaal, and some of them braved them again and again rather than submit to degrading legislation directed against their country. Many homes were broken in the course of that struggle, many families dispersed, some men at one time wealthy lost their all and became paupers, women and children endured untold hardships. But they were touched by Mr Gandhi's spirit, and that had wrought the transformation, thus illustrating the great power which the spirit of man exercises over human



minds and even over physical surroundings. In all my life I have known only two men who have affected me spiritually in the manner that Mr Gandhi does—our great patriarch Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji, and my late master Mr Ranade—men before whom not only are we ashamed of doing anything unworthy, but in whose presence our very minds are afraid of thinking anything that is unworthy. The Indian cause in South Africa has really been built up by Mr Gandhi. Without self and without stain, he has fought his great fight for this country during a period now of twenty years, and India owes an immense debt of gratitude to him. He has sacrificed himself utterly in the service of the cause. He had a splendid practice at the Bar, making as much as £ 5,000 to £ 6,000 a year, which is considered to be a very good income for a lawyer in South Africa. But he has given all that up, and he lives now on £ 3 a month like the poorest man in the street. One most striking fact about him is that, though he has waged this great struggle so ceaselessly, his mind is absolutely free from all bitterness against Europeans. And in my tour nothing warmed my heart more than to see the universal esteem in which the European community in South Africa holds Mr. Gandhi. At every gathering leading Europeans, when they came to know that Mr. Gandhi was there, would immediately gather round him anxious to shake hands with him, making it quite clear that, though they fought him hard and tried to crush him

in the course of the struggle, they honoured him as a man. To my mind Mr Gandhi's leadership of the Indian cause in South Africa is the greatest asset of that cause, and it was an inestimable privilege for me that he was with me throughout my tour to pilot me safely through my difficulties \*

\* From a speech delivered at the Bombay Town Hall in December, 1912

## ON THE BATTLE-FIELD

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VERE STENT

My first meeting with Mr Gandhi was under strange circumstances. It was on the road from Spion Kop, after the fateful retirement of the British troops in January, 1900. The previous afternoon I saw the Indian mule-train move up the slopes of the Kop carrying water to the distressed soldiers who had lain powerless on the plateau. The mules carried the water in immense bags, one on each side, led by Indians at their heads. The galling rifle-fire, which heralded their arrival on the top, did not deter the strange-looking cavalcade which moved slowly forward, and as an Indian fell, another quietly stepped forward to fill the vacant place. Afterwards the grim duty of the bearer corps, which Mr Gandhi organised in Natal, began. It was on such occasions that the Indians proved their fortitude, and the one with the greatest fortitude of all was the subject of this sketch. After a night's work, which had shattered men with much bigger frames I came across Gandhi in the early morning sitting by the roadside — eating a regulation army biscuit. Every man in Buller's force was dull and depressed, and damnation was heartily invoked on everything. But Gandhi was stoical in his bearing, cheerful, and confident in his

conversation, and had a kindly eye. He did one good. It was an informal introduction, and it led to a friendship. I saw the man and his small undisciplined corps on many a field of battle during the Natal campaign. When succour was to be rendered they were there. Their unassuming dauntlessness cost them many lives, and eventually an order was published forbidding them to go into the firing-line. Gandhi simply did his duty then, and his comment the other evening in the moment of his triumph, at the dinner to the Europeans who had supported the Indian movement, when some hundreds of his countrymen and a large number of Europeans paid him a noble tribute, was that he had simply done his duty.\*

(1911)

\* This article appeared in *The Illustrated Star of Johannesburg* 11 July 1911. The writer is a European.

## HIS LIFE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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DR. P J MEHTA

It will not be out of place to mention here the sort of life that Mr Gandhi usually leads in South Africa. His life is really very simple, and he manages to live on 15 rupees a month in the Transvaal where everything is expensive. He prefers country life to city life. He has a positive dislike for city life on account of its environments and its vices. In such a cold climate as that of Johannesburg, he takes two purely vegetarian meals, and takes no other beverage than pure water or milk. He usually takes his first meal at about one or half past one in the afternoon. It consists mostly of fruits and nuts. The second meal comes off at about seven in the evening, and as a rule it is of his own cooking. He has given up taking tea, coffee, cocoa, etc., as these articles are mostly prepared with the help of indentured labour. He generally performs his own domestic services, such as cleaning cooking utensils, sweeping the house, making up his bed, etc. In these matters also he acts on the principle of equality for all and would not allow anyone to render him such services as could be rendered for him by himself. His dietary is very simple as a rule, consisting only of bread, vegetables and fruits, and he never allows himself anything that is not absolutely required.

for health. In his younger days he made various experiments on his person to find out the bare minimum required to keep his body and soul together, and ultimately he has hit upon this dietary. He believes that by meeting the bare necessities of life, the soul is better purified. Writing to me lately from the Tolstoy Farm, where he is now living with a number of passive resisters' families, he says

“I prepare the bread that is required on the farm. The general opinion about it is that it is well made. Manilal and a few others have learnt how to prepare it. We put in no yeast and no baking powder. We grind our own wheat. We have just prepared some marmalade from the oranges grown on the farm. I have also learnt how to prepare ceramel coffee. It can be given as a beverage even to babies. The passive resisters on the farm have given up the use of tea and coffee, and taken to ceramel coffee prepared on the farm. It is made from wheat which is first baked in a certain way and then ground. We intend to sell our surplus production of the above three articles to the public later on. Just at present, we are working as labourers on the construction work that is going on on the farm, and have not time to produce more of the articles above mentioned than we need for ourselves.”

In the bitterest cold, he bathes in cold water and sleeps in the open verandah. When he goes out, he is obliged to dress in European style, but at home his

dress is mostly of Indian style. When he was last in India, he used to dress mostly in pure Indian style, wearing clothes made by hand. While practising as a Barrister in Kathiawad, he used to appear in the local courts in his Indian costume, with Indian-made sandals to his feet, and, according to the time immemorial custom in India, would leave his sandals outside the court before presenting himself to the judge. He has, in fact, gone through such a long course of training in the methods of living a life according to nature, that to do so has become quite a second nature with him now. That is how life in the Transvaal jails was by no means irksome to him. On the contrary, he considered it a blessing to be in jail, when his duty to his country demanded it of him.

What a vast change there is in his present life, and that of twelve years ago, when I put up with him, as his guest in his house situated not far from the Durban beach! The late Mr Escombe, for a long time Attorney-General of Natal, was almost his next-door neighbour. Even then, so far as he himself was concerned, his life was simple enough, but now it is much nearer the natural life than ever.

I have known Mr Gandhi for over twentytwo years very intimately. During all that time I have found that the one great difference between him and others is that once he is convinced that a particular line of conduct, as tested by the highest canons of morality

and the strictest doctrines of religion is correct, it will not be long before he adopts it for himself as his daily practice, if he has not already been observing it. He says that, if you wish the good of those you come in contact with, the only way to achieve the end is to be good yourself. Self-improvement and self-culture are his ideals. He always acts upon the proverb "Example is better than precept," and that is how all his theories and practice are blended so harmoniously one with another in his daily life. No earthly temptations are too strong for him, and none of them can make him swerve from the noble path that he has chalked out for himself. It is no exaggeration to say that in this age of materialism it is not possible to come across another man who lives the ideal life he preaches.\*

(1912)

\* Reproduced from the author's book *M K Gandhi and The South African Indian Problem*, by courtesy of the publishers, Messrs G. A. Natesan & Co, Madras



## THEIR HOME LIFE IN LONDON

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SAROJINI NAIDU

( A letter addressed to Lady Mehta in February 1915 )

I venture to write to you as I see by the papers that you are the presiding genius of the forthcoming function to welcome my friend, Mrs. Gandhi, home again. I feel that though, it may be the special privilege of the ladies of Bombay to accord her this personal ovation, all Indian women must associate themselves with you in spirit to do honour to one who, by her rare qualities of courage, devotion and self-sacrifice, has so signally justified and fulfilled the high traditions of Indian womanhood.

I believe I am one of the few people now back in India who had the good fortune to share the intimate home life of Mr. and Mrs. Gandhi in England, and I cherish two or three memories of the brief period in connection with the kindly and gentle lady, whose name has become a household word in our midst, with her broken health and her invincible fortitude—the fragile body of a child and the indomitable spirit of a martyr.

I recall my first meeting with them the day after their arrival in England. It was on a rainy August afternoon last year that I climbed the staircases of an

ordinary London dwelling house to find myself confronted with a true Hindu idyll of radiant and ascetic simplicity. The great South African leader who, to quote Mr Gokhale's apt phrase, had moulded heroes out of clay, was reclining, a little ill and weary, on the floor eating his frugal meal of nuts and fruit (which I shared), and his wife was busy and content as though she were a mere modest housewife absorbed in a hundred details of household service, and not the world-famed heroine of a hundred noble sufferings in a nation's cause.

I recall too the brilliant and thrilling occasion when men and women of all nationalities from East and West were gathered together to greet them in convincing proof that the true greatness speaks with a universal tongue and compels a universal homage. She sat by her husband's side, simple and serene and dignified in the hour of triumph, as she had proved herself simple and serene and dauntless in the hour of trial and tragedy.

I have a vision too of how her brave, frail, pain-worn hand must have held aloft the lamp of her country's honour undimmed in one alien land, working at rough garments for wounded soldiers, in another.

But there is one memory that to me is most precious and poignant, which I record as my personal tribute to her, and which serves not only to confirm

but to complete and crown all the beautiful and lofty virtues that have made her an ideal comrade and help-mate to her husband. On her arrival in England in the early days of the war, one felt that Mrs Gandhi was like a bird with eager outstretched wings longing to annihilate the time and distance that lay before her and her far-off India, and impatient of the brief and necessary interruption in her homeward flight. The woman's heart within her was full of yearning for the accustomed sounds and scenes of her own land and the mother's heart within her full of passionate hunger for the beloved faces of her children. . And yet when her husband, soon after felt the call, strong and urgent, to offer his services to the Empire and to form the Ambulance Corps that has since done such splendid work, she reached the high water mark of her loyal devotion to him, for she accepted his decision and strengthened his purpose with a prompt and willing renunciation of all her most dear and pressing desires. This to me is the real meaning of *Sati*. And it is this ready capacity for self-negation that has made me recognise anew that the true standard of a country's greatness lies not so much in its intellectual achievement and material prosperity as the undying spiritual ideals of love and service and sacrifice that inspire and sustain the mothers of the race.

I pray that the men of India may learn to realize in an increasing measure that it is through the worthi-

ness of their lives and the nobility of their character alone that we women can hope to find the opportunity and inspiration to adequately fulfil the finest possibilities of our womanhood even as Mrs Gandhi has fulfilled hers \*

\* Reproduced from *Speeches and Writings* of Shrimati Sarojini Naidu published by Messrs. Natesan & Co, Madras.

## GANDHI THE LEADER

---

G A NATESAN

It is hardly possible for any Indian to mention Mr Gandhi's name without deep emotion and pride. The name reminds us of the noble and inestimable services which this singularly great man—'Saint, Statesman and Patriot'—has rendered to his country. It recalls to our mind the story of the sufferings of thousands of our countrymen in South Africa. It recalls also how, at a supreme moment in the South African Indian struggle, Mr Gandhi, for the first time perhaps in the history of the world, resolved to employ the weapon of passive resistance to win the struggle into which he and his countrymen had thrown themselves heart and soul. It was a bold, unprecedented step which Mr Gandhi took at the moment. He and his countrymen were to fight not with vituperation, not with violence, not with organized riots and revolution, but with the strength of soul force. The soul force of Indians was pitted against the brute force of the White population in South Africa. Indians who joined the struggle in hundreds and thousands refused to obey the law and suffered in their own persons the consequences of such disobedience, and the spectacle afforded India and the world a magnificent example of self-denial.

and suffering for the sake of a peaceful and orderly agitation. For years the struggle went on, oftentimes under the most desperate conditions, and yet not one of the Indians was accused of using violence of any sort or employing methods of which he need be ashamed. And throughout, it was a magnificent and heroic struggle for right and for justice, and success was bound to attend on it in the end. It was a sight for the gods.

Mr Gandhi and his brave band have succeeded in removing the racial bar, have asserted the rights of Indians in South Africa to be consulted on all matters affecting their welfare, and more than all have made the authorities remember that an Asiatic has rights, that the British Indian subject carries with him the elementary right of British citizenship, and that even a selfish band of Colonials are bound to respect them to some extent at least. Mr Gandhi, who twenty years ago was hated and despised by the White population in South Africa, is now an object of veneration everywhere. He fought so hard and so steadfastly and yet so constitutionally. In his hands and in the hands of the handful of Indians who were living in far-off South Africa was the honour and self-respect of their Motherland. They have fought for it, suffered for it, and preserved it untarnished. Aye, they have added to its glory. It is difficult to single out from the great and noble patriots of this land of ours, living

or dead, any who can be said to equal Mr Gandhi Patriots there have been, and patriots there will be. It would be no exaggeration to say that of no one can it be said except Mr. Gandhi that in him patriotism has been a living faith, patriotism has been the real abnegation of the self and the surrender of all that is most near and dear to men in this world

For the great cause of which he was the representative no suffering was too great to be borne Was it necessary for the leader to go to jail for the vindication of justice? Mr Gandhi was ready Inside and outside the prison walls, under conditions the most wretched and humiliating, he showed the stuff of which heroes are made Was it necessary that an Indian woman should follow the example? His honoured spouse was ready Was it necessary that young boys should also follow the lead? Mr Gandhi's sons obeyed the call of duty Mr Gandhi, a high caste Hindu, the son of a Prime Minister of a great native State, the thriving barrister, a man who had enjoyed all the comforts and luxuries of the world, had sacrificed his practice, his profession, his health, his wealth, his fortune and everything at the altar of his country's cause, and borne cheerfully even the felon's fetters for maintaining the honour and self-respect of his Motherland

The thousands of Indians, who obeyed him readily without a murmur and who were ready to follow him

wherever he desired, were not educated in any sense of the word. They were poor men, born of the people, brought up among the people, pursuing their peaceful and humble avocations among the people—as barbers, washermen, hawkers and traders. Neither B A s nor M A s of our universities, knowing nothing of the liberalism of Lord Morley, the radicalism of John Stuart Mill, or even of the advanced socialism of Mr Lloyd George, and indeed never having read a single syllable about the elementary rights of man or of liberty, equality and fraternity, at the call of duty and under the guidance of a singularly noble soul, they were ready to throw themselves into a struggle which involved untold sufferings and unmentionable humiliations. Several homes were rendered desolate, several trading concerns were closed or completely ruined. And yet nothing could daunt them, nothing could prevent them from pursuing the path of duty which had been pointed out to them by their honoured leader. Long, trying and painful was their suffering, and yet how willingly, how cheerfully, they bore it all! They fought, they resolutely and bravely fought, for the honour and the good name of their race and their country. All honour, therefore, to Mr Gandhi who “has moulded heroes out of clay”. And even if the cause of the South African Indians had utterly failed and their heroic campaign had proved futile, the legacy of the great spiritual asset given by Mr Gandhi to his countrymen will be a proud



possession indeed As the late Mr Gokhale observed of him, "a purer, a nobler, a braver, and a more exalted spirit has never moved on this earth Mr Gandhi is one of those men who, living austere simple life themselves and devoted to all the highest principles of love to their fellow-beings and to truth and justice, touch the eyes of their weaker brethren as with magic and give them a new vision He is a man who may be well described as a man among men, a hero among heroes a patriot among patriots, and we may well say that in him Indian humanity at the present time has really reached its high water mark " Surely some will hearken to the message of such a man ~

(1918)

\* The preface to the first edition of Gandhi's *Speeches and Writings* published by Messrs G A Natesan & Co, Madras Reproduced by courtesy of the author and the publishers

## SAINT, PATRIOT AND STATESMAN

---

HY S L POLAK

If there is one characteristic more than another that stamps Mr Gandhi as a man amongst men, it is his extraordinary love of truth. His search for it is the one passion of his life, and every action of his indicates the devotee of this usually distant shrine. Whatever he says, even those most hostile to him unhesitatingly believe, as being the truth so far as he is aware of it, and he will not hesitate to retract, publicly and immediately, anything that he may have unwittingly declared to be a fact, but which he afterwards finds to be unwarranted. His political opponents admit unquestioningly that every action of his is prompted only by the most conscientious and impersonal motives. In his legal practice, which he long ago definitely abjured as an 'unclean thing', he was highly regarded by his fellow-practitioners as an able lawyer and an honourable colleague or opponent, and magistrates and judges alike paid careful attention to any case that Mr Gandhi advocated, realizing that it had intrinsic merits or that he sincerely believed that it had. He has been known to retire from a case in open court, and in the middle of the hearing, having realized that his client had deceived him, and he never accepted a

case except on the express understanding that he reserved to himself the right to withdraw at any stage if he felt that his client had not dealt honestly with him

His self-suppression and courtesy are universally recognized and appreciated. He has scarcely ever been known to give angry expression to his feelings, and then only when moved by a sense of righteous indignation. He has never, during the whole course of his public career, condescended to the use of the average politician's dictionary of invectives, and his courtesy and urbanity towards opponents arises from his desire and ability to place himself in their position before attacking it.

His generosity is proverbial. He never issued a formal demand for payment of a debt to him, conceiving that his debtor, if an honest man, would pay when he could, and if a dishonest man, would not be made the more honest by the use of legal compulsion. Indeed, in his every action, he vindicates his hostility to the doctrine of force and his abiding affection for that of love as a rule of life. When he was nearly done to death by a fanatical Pathan in 1908, he absolutely refused to charge his assailant or to give evidence against him. He preferred to conquer him by love, and succeeded, for early the following year the Pathan, who had been deported to India because he sturdily refused to comply with the Transvaal Law, addressed

a letter to Mr Gandhi in which he assured the latter that all his sympathies were with him, and that he would do what he could to help the cause

Mr Gandhi's sense of public duty is profound Just before his first arrest, he received the news that his youngest child was desperately ill, and he was asked to go to Phoenix at once if he wished to save him He refused, saying that his greater duty lay in Johannesburg where the community had need of him, and his child's life or death must be left in God's hands Similarly, during his second imprisonment, he received telegraphic news of Mrs. Gandhi's serious illness, and was urged even by the visiting magistrate to pay his fine and so become free to nurse her Again he refused, declining to be bound by private ties when such action would probably result in weakening the community of which he was the stay and the inspiration And although after his release and his subsequent re-arrest, he could have secured indefinite postponement of the hearing of his case, so that he might nurse Mrs. Gandhi back to health after a serious operation, as soon as he heard that the Transvaal Government were anxious to see him back again in gaol, he hastened to the Transvaal from Natal, leaving Mrs. Gandhi, for aught he knew to the contrary, on her deathbed Yet he is a devoted husband and father, and is intensely attached to children Indeed, he is never happier than when with little children.

His sense of duty was never more strikingly demonstrated than when he set out, on that fateful morning in February, 1908, to fulfil his pledge to the Transvaal Government that he would undertake voluntary registration. He knew that owing to a misunderstanding, which even his lucidity and persuasiveness could not overcome, a small section of the community had been rendered bitterly hostile to him, and that his future assailant was at the moment in his office and awaiting an opportunity for a physical attack, which could only be effected in the open street. Mr Gandhi had no thought of seeking police protection against a compatriot, but walked straight to the Registration Office, and on the way the expected attack was delivered. Bleeding from open wounds and in the greatest pain, he was taken to the Rev J. J. Duke's house, but before he would permit the doctor to stitch up his face, which was badly gashed, he insisted upon completing the form of application for voluntary registration in the presence of the Registrar of Asiatics, giving full details as to identity, like the least of his followers—Mr Gandhi has always steadfastly refused, either within or outside of prison, to avail himself to any privilege that is not accorded to the humblest of his countrymen—and then permitted his wound to be sewn up without availing himself of an anæsthetic. That same day, though tossing feverishly upon a sick-bed, he issued the following manifesto to the Indian community, which had for the moment

been taken aback by the suddenness of the assault and by a series of foolish errors on the part of the registration officials

“Those who have committed the act did not know what they were doing They thought that I was doing what was wrong They have had their redress in the only manner they know I therefore request that no steps be taken against them Seeing that the assault was committed by a Muslim or Muslims, the Hindus might probably feel hurt If so, they would put themselves in the wrong before the world and their Maker Rather let the blood spilt today cement the two communities indissolubly—such is my heart-felt prayer May God grant it! The spirit of passive resistance rightly understood should make the people fear none and nothing but God—no cowardly fear, therefore, should deter the vast majority of sober-minded Indians from doing their duty The promises of repeal of the Act, Against voluntary registration, having been given, it is the sacred duty of every true Indian to help the Government and the Colony to the uttermost ”

To assume responsibilities, to recognize obligations, was always Mr Gandhi's main thought in his relations with the European colonists of South Africa, for he knew that the completest rights cannot be availed of by undeveloped and irresponsible people Hence his offers, on behalf of the community, of ambulance and

and stretcher-bearer corps, his desire to afford the Government and Municipal authorities the utmost help at all times in the proper conduct of public affairs and the governance and uplifting of the Indian community. He always felt that the only possible road to progress was by compelling the European colonists to recognise the real worth and sterlingness of character of his compatriots and a deep-seated desire to secure mutual respect was at the bottom of his action in advising his fellow countrymen to continue the struggle for the preservation of their manhood.

Mr Gandhi will not hesitate, when necessary, to set himself against the opinion of many of his countrymen or boldly to declare whose is the responsibility for any recognized evil. Indeed his general attitude may be briefly summed up in the following statements he once made to the writer. Most religious men I have met are politicians in disguise, I, however, who wear the guise of a politician, am at heart a religious man."

So far as the Indian community itself was concerned, Mr Gandhi had appointed for himself one supreme task—to bring Hindus and Mussalmans together and to make them realise that they were one brotherhood and sons of the same Motherland. His attitude as a Hindu towards Mussalmans is well defined in the following letter addressed by him to a Muslim correspondent.

“I never realise any distinction between a Hindu and a Muslim. To my mind both are sons of Mother India. I know that Hindus are in a numerical majority and that they are believed to be more advanced in knowledge and education. Accordingly, they should be glad to give way so much the more to their Muslim brethren. As a man of truth, I honestly believe that Hindus should yield up to the Muslims what the latter desire, and they should rejoice in so doing. We can expect unity only if such mutual large-heartedness is displayed. When the Hindus and Muslims act towards each other as blood-brothers, then alone can there be unity, then only can we hope for the dawn of India.”

And as has already been seen, Mr Gandhi is prepared to shed his blood in order that the bonds of Hindu-Muslim brotherhood might be the more firmly cemented.

His chivalry is at once the admiration of his friends and followers and the confusion of enemies. A telling example of this was given when, in October, 1908, together with a number of compatriots, he was arrested and charged at Volksrust, the Transvaal border town. Mr Gandhi then gave the following evidence on behalf of his fellow-countrymen whom he was defending, and though he was not called upon to make these admissions:

“He took the sole responsibility for having advised them to enter the Colony. They had largely been



influenced by his advice, though, no doubt, they had used their own judgment. He thought that, in giving that advice, he had consulted the best interests of the State. He asked the accused to enter at a public meeting and individually. They probably, at that time, had no idea of entering the Colony, except, perhaps, one of them. He would certainly admit that he had assisted the accused to enter. He admitted aiding and abetting them to enter the Transvaal. He was quite prepared to suffer the consequence of his action, as he always had been."

Later, when giving evidence on his own behalf, he said "In connection with my refusal to produce my registration certificate and to give thumb-impressions or finger impressions, I think that, as an officer of this Court, I owe an explanation. There have been differences between the Government and British Indians, whom I represent as Secretary of the British Indian Association, over the Asiatic Act, No. 2 of 1907, and after due deliberation, I took upon myself the responsibility of advising my countrymen not to submit to the primary obligation imposed by the Act, but still, as law-abiding subjects of the State, to accept its sanctions. Rightly or wrongly, in common with other Asiatics, I consider that the Act in question, among other things, offends our conscience, and the only way, I thought, as I still think, the Asiatics could show their feeling with regard to it, was to incur its penalties.

And in pursuance of the policy, I admit that I have advised the accused who have preceded me to refuse submission to the Act as also the Act 36 of 1908, seeing that, in the opinion of British Indians, full relief, that was promised by the Government, has not been granted I am now before the Court to suffer the penalties that may be awarded to me "

And when he was next sentenced, Mr Gandhi made the following declaration "It is my misfortune that I have to appear before the Court for the same offence the second time I am quite aware that my offence is deliberate and wilful I have honestly desired to examine my conduct in the light of past experience, and I maintain the conclusion that, no matter what my countrymen do or think, as a citizen of the State and as a man who respects conscience above everything, I must continue to incur the penalties so long as justice, as I conceive it, has not been rendered by the State to a portion of its citizens I consider myself the greatest offender in the Asiatic struggle, if the conduct that I am pursuing is held to be reprehensible. I therefore regret that I am being tried under a clause which does not enable me to ask for a penalty which some of my fellow-objectors received, but I ask you to impose on me the highest penalty "

Thus Mr Gandhi indicated his willingness to become a passive resister even against his own countrymen, if need be, and his anxiety, like the Greek hero

who rushed into the fray and found death by gathering into his own breast the spears of the enemy, to bring salvation to his people by accepting the fullest responsibility and the heaviest penalties. Even whilst in gaol, he was a passive resister, for he declined to eat the special food provided for him until his Indian fellow-prisoners were given a more suitable diet, and he deliberately starved himself upon one wretched meal a day for six weeks, until the authorities were obliged to promise a modified diet scale for Indian prisoners, a promise which they later fulfilled—for the worse

Mr. Gandhi put his thought on the meaning of passive resistance concisely and in a direct form, when he addressed the following exhortation to the Transvaal Tamil community "Remember that we are descendants of Prahlad and Sudhanva, both passive resisters of the purest type. They disregarded the dictates even of their parents when they were asked to deny God. They suffered extreme torture rather than inflict suffering on their persecutors. We in the Transvaal are being called upon to deny God, in that we are required to deny our manhood, go back upon our oath, and accept an insult to our nation. Shall we, in the present crisis, do less than our forefathers?"

His simplicity is extreme. He is a devoted follower of Tolstoy and Ruskin in their appeal for simpler life, and himself lives the life of an ascetic,

eating the simplest fruits of the earth, sleeping often on a piece of sacking on the bare earth in the open air, and he cares nothing for personal appearance. He has reduced himself to a condition of voluntary poverty, and he has entirely abandoned the practice of law, believing that he cannot consistently obtain his livelihood from a profession that derives its sanction from physical force. He acknowledges no binding ties of kin or custom, but only of the obligation of his own conscience. Ramakrishna tested his freedom from caste prejudice by sweeping out a pariah's hut with his own hair. Mohandas Gandhi has tested his by tending the wounds of a savage with his own hands. With him the spirit of religion is everything, the world and its opinion nothing. He does not know how to distinguish Hindu from Muslim, Christian from infidel. To him all alike are brothers, fragments of the Divine, fellow-spirits struggling for expression. All he has, he gives. With him self-surrender and absolute sacrifice are demands of his very nature. His deep spirituality influences all round, so that no man dares to commit evil in his presence. He lives in the happiness of his friends, but he does not hesitate to create a condition of spiritual unrest in them when he conceives it his duty to point out the right and condemn the wrong. He cannot condone falsehood, but he reproves and rebukes lovingly. Indeed, love is his only weapon against evil. He sees God in every living thing, and therefore loves all mankind and the whole animal world.

He is strictly vegetarian, not because of orthodoxy, but because he cannot cause the death of any creature and because he believes that life is of God. In faith he is probably nearer in touch with pure Jainism or Buddhism than any other creed, though no formal creed can really hold him. To him all is God, and from that reality he deduces his whole line of conduct. Perhaps, in this generation, India has not produced such a noble man—saint, patriot, statesman in one. He lives for God and for India. His one desire is to see unity amongst his fellow-countrymen. His every endeavour in South Africa was directed to showing the possibility of Indian national unity and the lines upon which the national edifice should be constructed. His winning manners, pleasant smile, refreshing candour, and originality of thought and action mark him out as a leader of men. But those who know him best recognise in him the religious teacher, the indicator of God, the inspiring example of “a pure, holy soul”, as he has been called by the Rev F B Meyer, the modesty, humility and utter self-abnegation of whose life provide a lesson for all who have eyes to see, ears to hear, and an understanding spirit.

How he starved and fasted and sought to purify his physical nature, is to tell the story of a man to whom self-suffering is a daily joy and delight. And he did not subdue his body at the cost of his spirituality, as is the habit of so many self-tormentors, but his soul

grew in exultation as he felt himself free to express his higher nature and to devote greater energy to the service of his countrymen. He has been a true *bhakta*, a devotee of the most earnest and humble type. Praise has always been painful and distasteful to him, though he has been lavish of it as regards his fellow-workers. Every action of his life has been performed in the service of that Divine Essence that has so profoundly permeated his own being — from the grinding of wheat in his own home to the planting of fruit trees, the teaching of little children, and the serving of his countrymen at the Kumbha Mela at Hardwar.

But it is the majestic personality of the man Mohandas Gandhi, that overshadows his comparatively insignificant physique. One feels oneself in the presence of a moral giant, whose pellucid soul is a clear, still lake, in which one sees Truth clearly mirrored. His is the meekness that has turned away wrath a thousand times, and that has disarmed opponents even when most hostile. Unarmed for war, he yet has conquered peace, for his weapons have been the age-old arms of moral fervour, calm determination, spiritual exaltation, sacrifice of the lower self, service of his fellow-men, lowliness, steadfastness, and an overwhelming love bestowed equally upon every living thing. A movement with such a man at its heart could not but succeed, and so the Passive Resistance struggle came to an end and freed its greatest exponent for still

greater service on a wider stage. Meanwhile, he has fixed the lines of growth of his countrymen in South Africa, indicated the path and means of patriotic development for his countrymen in the Motherland, rallied the best of European sentiment to the South African Indian cause, developed the possibilities of Passive Resistance, and added yet one more name to the golden scroll of those who have deserved well of their country and of mankind.

Yet this is not the whole man. You cannot say this is he, that is he. All that you can say with certainty is that he is here, he is there. Everywhere his influence reigns, his authority rules, his elusive personality pervades, and this must be so, for it is true of all great men that they are incalculable, beyond definition. They partake of the nature of the Illimitable and the Eternal from which they have sprung and to which they are bound. With their feet firm-set on earth and their hands amongst the stars, they are pointers of the way to those who search, encouragers of the faint and weary, inspirers of those breathing in deep draughts of hope.

## GANDHIJI AND WOMEN

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MILLIE GRAHAM POLAK

Most women love men for such attributes as are usually considered masculine. Yet Mahatma Gandhi has been given the love of many women for his womanliness, for all those qualities that are associated with women — great faith, great fortitude, great devotion, great patience, great tenderness, and great sympathy. Women could sense that in him they found a fellow-traveller, one who had passed ahead along the road they too were travelling, and could give him an affection deep, pure, and untouched by any play of sex-emotion. Women of all kinds have turned to him in perplexity and trouble, and no problem of their lives but could be discussed with absolute frankness, if they desired to do so. They could be sure that some light would be thrown upon their difficulties and the path made to look not too arduous to travel. He seemed to understand how easy it might be for a woman to do what appeared to be evil for love's sake, to sympathise with the soul-surrender which prompted the action, and yet to condemn it unflinchingly and point out that the way of love's service could not be through ministering to anything but the highest. I have known many occasions when a woman has gone to him deeply troubled because she had to acquiesce in



some seriously dishonourable action of her husband. Mahatmajī has sympathised with her difficulty, never suggested that she should betray her knowledge of her husband's action, but advised her to use all her love and woman's power to get the man to amend his ways. For himself, he chose the path of the ascetic, yet I have always known him to make allowances for those who could not tread the cold, austere path of denial. If comforts and objects of beauty seemed essential to the woman who discussed such a question with him, he would, had it been in his power, have given them to her, but, at the same time, he would try and persuade her to seek beauty in the things of the spirit and not to identify herself with the things of the world. Perhaps, sometimes, he did not quite realise that so many women, while having great possessions, can yet stand outside of them. So often the woman herself does not realise it until she is called upon to give them up. Then she knows they have very little real meaning to her, neither are they the things that matter most.

I often see in imagination Mahatmajī, as I frequently saw him in South Africa, walking up and down a room with a young child in his arms, soothing it in the almost unconscious way a woman does, and, at the same time, discussing with the utmost clearness pressing political questions, communal strife, or abstract problems in philosophy, and children instinctively knew

this side of his character, they would nestle up to him, sure of the comfort they desired. In some ways I have thought it was easier for him to deal with the needs of young children than those of adolescence, with its warring emotions, its struggle for liberty and self-expression, and its developing mind. During that period in the life of the developing individual, he did not so easily realise the strength of the storms that can sweep reason aside, and when as it unfortunately sometimes happened, he was deceived by the youth around him, it was because in his own great simplicity he did not appreciate the amazing complexity of the character of youth. He saw so clearly the straight path that should be trod, that he seemed to find it somewhat difficult to deal with the dual nature that becomes apparent during those years when one passes from childhood into adulthood. When, however, the individual had taken upon himself his adult character, then again, for Mahatmaji, contact and understanding were once more easy and could be complete.

Another of the many pictures of life in South Africa arises clearly in my mind. It was during the early years of life in Phoenix. Mahatmaji had at this time come to definite conclusions about sex-abstinence. He had written and spoken on the subject very decisively. I had had several discussions with him about the continuance of human life on this planet, and had, on one occasion, remarked that he must surely consider

that God was wrong in having created men and women with their senses and emotions, since, were they to accept and adopt Mahatmaji's dictum, then God's expression through creation would cease, self-control, I contended, being the goal of developed humanity and not the denial of God's method of peopling the world. Very soon after this conversation, one of the members of the little settlement at Phoenix gave birth to a child. I purposely refrained from speaking of the matter when I visited Phoenix two or three days later. I thought that perhaps Mahatmaji might feel the fact displeasing. After a short time, and having talked of other things, he said in a surprised voice "You have not asked about the mother and babe. Do you not want to see them?" He then came with me to see the baby and talked in a quiet, joyous way to the mother; and I realised in a flash that, even as a woman does, he differentiated between abstract principles and human needs and affections.

Only once have I known him fail to comprehend the deep emotions of a woman's life, and that was in not understanding the depth of absolute sorrow into which a woman, bereft of her dearly beloved by death, was plunged. Perhaps it was the one experience that he had not until then fully entered into, and he could not, therefore, realise how sick the soul of such a woman could be. Or it may have been that his belief in woman's consciousness of her touch with the All

Father precluded him from knowing that women also have their periods of standing alone in an empty universe, where God has ceased to be and man is a vanishing shadow \*

# A LIBERATED SOUL

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RABINDRANATH TAGORE

‘What do you think of Mahatma Gandhi?’

‘What do I think of Mahatma Gandhi?’ said the poet-philosopher, emphatically, ‘why I think very highly of Gandhi. He is a great man a — great soul. He today wields tremendous power over the teeming millions of India’

‘What is really the secret of his success?’

‘The secret of Gandhi’s success,’ said the Hindu Noble prizeman enthusiastically, ‘lies in his dynamic spiritual strength and incessant self-sacrifice. Many public men make sacrifices for selfish reasons. It is a sort of investment that yields handsome dividends. Gandhi is altogether different. He is unique in the nobility. His very life is another name for sacrifice. He is sacrifice itself. He covets no power, no position, no wealth, no name and no fame. Offer him the throne of all India, he will refuse to sit on it, but will sell the jewels and distribute the money among the needy. Give him all the money America possesses, and he will certainly refuse to accept it, unless to be given away for a worthy cause for the uplift of humanity. His soul is perpetually anxious to give, and he expects absolutely nothing in return—not

even thanks This is no exaggeration, for I know him well He came to our school at Bolpur and lived with us for some time His power of sacrifice becomes all the more irresistible because it is wedded with his paramount fearlessness Emperors and Maharajas, guns and bayonets, imprisonments and tortures, insults and injuries, even death itself, can never daunt the spirit of Gandhi His is a liberated soul If anyone strangles me, I shall be crying for help, but if Gandhi were strangled, I am sure he would not cry He may laugh at his strangler, and if he has to die, he will die smiling His simplicity of life is childlike, his adherence to truth is unflinching, his love for mankind is positive and aggressive He has what is known as the Christ spirit The longer I know him, the better I like him It is needless for me to say that this great man is destined to play a prominent part in moulding the future of the world.'

'Such a great man deserves to be better known in the world Why don't you make him known, you are a world figure,' I said

'How can I make him known? I am nothing compared to his illumined soul. And no truly great man has to be made great They are great in their own glory, and when the world is ready they become famous by dint of their own greatness When the time comes Gandhi will be known, for the world needs him and his message of love, liberty and brotherhood

The soul of the East has found a worthy symbol in Gandhi, for he is most eloquently proving that man is essentially a spiritual being, that he flourishes best in the realm of the moral and the spiritual, and most positively perishes both body and soul in the atmosphere of hatred and gunpowder smoke. A few months ago he said that India would win Swaraj (national government) within a year. It may not come to pass within the time indicated, but he is sincere and he believes in it. It goes without saying that he will spare no pains, no privations and sacrifices to attain the end in view. His South African fight, the moral fight of passive resistance extending over eight years, was crowned with success. 'Truth may be crushed by brute force for a while, but it is sure to triumph in the long run.'

'What do you really think of the non-cooperation movement in India?'

'It is a great movement indeed. It is a conflict of ideas with physical violence. I have more faith in the force of ideas than in physical force. It is fortunate that this movement is headed by a man like Gandhi whose saintly life has made him adored all over India. As long as he is at the helm I am not afraid of the ship, or doubtful of its safe arrival at the port of destination.'

## AT THE SASSOON HOSPITAL

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V S SRINIVASA SASTRI

I was called suddenly to the Sassoon Hospital yesterday night to see Mahatma Gandhi. In view of the profound interest that the matter would have for the public, I venture to make the following statement.

Dr V B Gokhale came to me at about 8-45 p.m. just as I was finishing my dinner and told me how the Yeravda authorities had removed Mr Gandhi to the Sassoon Hospital where he was in charge. He was about to be operated upon for appendicitis. As the case was serious the patient had been asked whether he would like any doctor friends of his to be sent for. He had mentioned Dr Dalal of Bombay and Dr Jivraj Mehta who was in Baroda. Both had been wired to, and attempts had been made but in vain, to get at Dr Dalal by means of the phone. Meanwhile, in view of the patient's temperature and pulse, it had been decided to perform the operation immediately, and he was asked whether he would like to have any friends brought to see him. He mentioned me, Dr. Phatak of the Non-co-operation Party, and Mr N C Kelkar, Dr Gokhale and I started at once and took Dr. Phatak on the way, Mr Kelkar being away at Satara. On my entering the room we greeted each other, and I



enquired how he felt as to the operation. He answered firmly that the doctors had come to a definite conclusion, and that he was content to abide by it. In reply to further inquiry he said that he had full confidence in the medical men about him, and that they had been very kind and very careful. Should there arise any public agitation, he added, then it should be made known that he had no complaint whatsoever to make against the authorities, and that so far as the care of his body went their treatment left nothing to be desired.

Then I enquired if Mrs. Gandhi had been informed of his condition. He said that she did not know the latest developments, but she knew that for some time he had not been well, and he expected to hear from her. He then made enquiries of my wife and of my colleagues in the Servants of India Society, viz. Messrs. Devadhar, Joshi, Patwardhan and Kunzru. "Have your frequent journeys out of India benefited your health?" asked the Mahatma.

Dr. Phatak then read a draft statement to be signed by Mr. Gandhi conveying his consent to the operation. After hearing it once, Mr. Gandhi put on his spectacles and read it himself. Then he said he would like the wording changed, and asked Col. Maddock who was in the room what he thought. The Colonel said that, since Mr. Gandhi knew best how to put it in appropriate language, his own suggestion

would not be of much value. Then he dictated a longish statement which I took down in pencil. It was addressed to Col Maddock who was to perform the operation. The letter acknowledged the exceeding kindness and attention which he had received from Col Maddock, the Surgeon-General, and other medical officers and attendants, and stated that he had the utmost confidence in Col Maddock. It proceeded to thank the Government for their considerateness in allowing him to send for his own doctors, but as they could not be got in spite of the best attempts made by Col. Maddock, and as delay would in the opinion of the Colonel involved serious risk, Mr Gandhi requested him to perform the operation at once. When it was finished I read it out to him once. Then he called Col Maddock to his side, and I read it again at his desire. Col Maddock was quite satisfied and remarked "Of course, you know best how to put it in proper language." He then drew up his knees in posture for signing the paper which he did in pencil. His hand shook very much, and I noticed that he did not dot the 'i' at the end. He remarked to the doctor "See how my hand trembles. You will have to put this right." Col Maddock answered "Oh! we will put tons and tons of strength into you."

As the operation room was being got ready, the doctors went out, and I found myself nearly alone with the Mahatma. After a remark or two of a purely

personal nature I asked him whether he had anything particular to say. I noticed a touch of eagerness as he replied, as though he was waiting for an opportunity to say something. "If there is an agitation," he said, "for my release after the operation, which I do not wish, let it be on proper lines. My quarrel with the Government is there and will continue so long as the originating causes exist. Of course there can't be any conditions. If Government think they have kept me long enough, they may let me go. That would be honourable. If they think that I am an innocent man and that my motives have been good, that while I have deep quarrel with the Government I love Englishmen and have many friends amongst them, they may release me. But it must not be on false issues. Any agitation must be kept on proper non-violent lines. Perhaps I have not expressed myself quite well, but you had better put it in your own inimitable style." I mentioned the motions of which notice had been given in the Assembly, and added that though Government might in other circumstances have opposed it, I expected that they would take a different line.

I then pressed him again for a message to his people, his followers or the country. He was surprisingly firm on this subject. He said he was a prisoner of Government and he must observe the prisoner's code of honour scrupulously. He was supposed to be civilly dead. He had no knowledge of outside events,

and he could not have anything to do with the public. He had no message.

"How is it then that Mr Mahomed Ali communicated a message as from you the other day?" The words were scarcely out of my mouth when I regretted them. But recall was impossible. He was obviously astonished at my question and exclaimed, "Mr Mahomed Ali! A message from me!" Luckily at this point the nurse came in with some articles of apparel for him, and signalled me to depart. In a few minutes he was shifted to the operation room. I sat outside marvelling at the exhibition I had witnessed of high-mindedness, forgiveness, chivalry and love transcending ordinary human nature, and what mercy it was that the non-co-operation movement should have had a leader of such serene vision and sensitiveness to honour! The Surgeon-General and the Inspector-General of Prisons were also there. I could see from their faces how anxious they were at the tremendous responsibility that lay on them. They said that the patient had borne the operation very well indeed, that some push had come out, and that it was a matter of congratulation that the operation had not been delayed any longer. The patient had morphia and was expected to sleep soundly for some time longer, when we dispersed.

I learnt from the doctor this morning that the patient's condition was thoroughly satisfactory. I have

read out this statement to Di Phatak who approves of it, and adds that his inquiry as to a message elicited the same sort of answer \*

Poona, January 13, 1924

\* A Press Statement.

## HIS MESSAGE TO THE ENGLISH PEOPLE

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MURIEL LESTER

I had come some thousands of miles to see Gandhiji (October 1926) He had left his spinning wheel to greet me on my arrival, with a handshake of real friendship He had garlanded me a few hours later, adorning me with the necklace of marigolds that had been presented to him earlier on the day in honour of his birthday In the evening he had taught me how to squat on the verandah, while Mrs Gandhi fed us both with fruit He had shown himself the simplest and friendliest of men, but during the succeeding weeks I could not bring myself to go to his room for a talk

Next day I went His room is large and low, furnished with a bench, a stool and a spinning wheel, and an eighteen-inch-high writing-desk, at which he squats on the ground By now I had learnt to squat in comfort, and desiring to show off my proficiency in the national attitude of repose, I seated myself on the ground in front of him He looked at me with intense amusement, and grinning broadly in return, I blurted out the question "Bapu, please will you come to England?"

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"What would be the good?" he replied. "We here in India have not yet experienced such success with our non-resistance methods as to justify my coming to England to tell you good people there anything that would be of use to you"

I rocked back on my heels, the better to regard his face "But I don't want you to come to England to teach us," I assured him.

"No?" he queried tentatively "And what is it you want me to come for?"

"I want you to come over to England to learn from us," I announced His face glowed with delight "Quite right, quite right," he ejaculated "It would give me great joy to meet your people, to talk with your stalwarts, and to exchange experiences with George Davies and others Very well, then, I will come to England."

"That's good," I exclaimed

"But on conditions," he announced.

"Tell them to me, please," I requested him

"There are three," he answered I will come to England if you can persuade the cotton spinners of Manchester not to ship any more of their manufactured goods to India "

"I know a few of them," said I laughingly "So at least I can pass on your request to them. Is the second condition any easier?"

“The second is that you should persuade your Cabinet Ministers and your Members of Parliament to give India Swaraj ”

“And what is the third ?” I asked and could see that he was going to talk seriously this time

He made a little pause, and then answered in measured and deliberate tone, “I will come to England if, when you go home, you will tell your fellow-countrymen what you have seen for yourself since you have mixed with our people Tell them of the doped babies and of the drinking habits of the Untouchable children Tell them that, though the Hindu and the Moslem religions forbid drinking, and it is against our instinct and our natural habits to touch alcohol, yet the habit is spreading wherever we mix with Europeans Tell them that we have set our hearts on ridding the country both of opium and drink , that all parties and religions in India are agreed in this, but that nevertheless we cannot cope with this thing successfully because of revenue considerations. Tell them that, under the Government of India Act, Excise has been transferred in such a way as to make the development of education and other nation-building services dependent upon the liquor revenue Tell them that the opium evil is not nearly as serious as the drink evil The opium addict only makes himself suffer The drinker makes others suffer, generally women Tell them that to us Indians it is as immoral to run a



state on the proceeds of drink as it would be to you to run it on the proceeds of legalised prostitution Stir up public opinion, convert Cabinet Ministers, and convince Members of Parliament, rouse the Churches, and make the whole nation see that they must no longer obstruct our national passion for Prohibition As soon as you let me know that you have done this thing, I will come at my own expense, with ten million signatures of my countrymen, to complete the great work "

There was silence

At length I said, "I rather think I'll have a shot at that job "

On his return from Gauhati (January 1927), Gandhiji stayed with a friend in Calcutta for a while. I used to go to the house once or twice each day, as the time of my departure from India was near and Gandhiji had much advice to give me

"You have seen things for yourself so far, now you must test your experience by that of your fellow-countrymen It is possible that when you have read more and met others your opinions may change. You must call on the chief Excise official of the city, and have a talk with the Rev W.C. Anderson There's nothing he does not know about the opium and drink situation Furthermore, you cannot begin to speak in public in England about what you have

seen here without first going to the India Office and telling Lord Birkenhead all you intend to say "

My heart sank That statesman's glittering prizes and his sharp and gleaming swords had never appealed to me, but the ruthless voice continued

"You must not leave this Province without seeing the Governor You must go to Lord Lytton and tell him what you are going to say in England "

"But I don't know him, and he won't want to see me," I demurred

"You can easily get an interview with him You are a British subject," he went on at his even impersonal tone, something akin to the hum of the spinning wheel which he turns all the time that he is speaking

"How?" I demanded

"It is easy You can do it You must also see the Bishop of Calcutta "

"But, Gandhiji, I have to leave the day after tomorrow," I objected.

"Then send a wire and cancel your passage," he replied tranquilly, his eyes intent on his wheel as usual I preferred not to, however So I called on the Bishop in the hope that he would perhaps arrange an interview with the Governor But naturally enough he could see no special reason why Lord Lytton should want to see me.

"Unless you are a fully accredited social worker," he added, having heard that I lived in East London

Hastily replying "Oh, no ? certainly not. I am no such thing," I thrust from me the hideous imputation and retired to the house of the seven brothers, there to pen a note to His Excellency, asking for ten minutes of his valuable time. The letter was despatched and the answer received by phone within an hour or two. I was invited for the next afternoon. It was no small ordeal to drive up through the stiff imposing garden, past the flight of gleaming white stone steps, to the doorway guarded by Indians in crimson-velvet uniforms. Governors in India are supposed to keep a state that is more than kingly. I felt shabby, inconsequent, out-of-place and futile.

But as soon as I reached Lord Lytton in his own room every thing became easy. How absurd it is that we let ourselves get frightened and oppressed by things by appearance, by superficialities like those stone steps the flunkeys and the formal garden, when all the time people are so easy to get on with.

Gandhiji continued his spinning as I told him of the delightful hour I had spent with the Governor. He was obviously pleased with all the visits I had paid and before saying farewell he reminded me of the correct procedure to be followed if one wants to attain one's end.

“Speak the truth, without fear and without exaggeration, and see everyone whose work is relative to your purpose. You are on God’s work, so you need not fear men’s scorn. If they listen to your requests and grant them, you will be satisfied. If they reject them, then you must make their rejection your strength. Let me know how you get on. Write to me about your own work, too. Goodbye, God bless you.”\*

\* Reproduced from *My Host the Hindu* through the courtesy of Miss Lester

## AT SABARMATI

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HORACE G ALEXANDER

Now at last I come to Mr Gandhi. It seemed rather symbolical that Mr Gandhi should live so near a prison — as if to emphasize the contrast between the old dispensation and the new — and to remind the new that it has not yet abolished the old ... .

We returned together to the 7 p.m. prayers, just as the sun was setting. It was very peaceful sitting on the ground in the little "square" just above the river and listening to the occasional cries of the birds — the fluting calls of waders, the sharp cries of various kingfishers, and the harsh squawk of herons. Gradually one after the other the members of the *ashram* came and sat down on the ground. There must be nearly a hundred in all. One brought a cloth and a pillow, the latter propped against the wall facing us — luxuries that I am sure Mr. Gandhi dislikes, but his health now makes them necessary. Then an erect figure, spare but neither thinner nor shorter than most of his fellow countrymen, comes stepping quickly, and without ado he has seated himself with his legs crossed, like the others. He folds an upper garment about his shoulders, and, I think, immediately closes his eyes to join in the chanting, which begins almost at once.

But as I closed my eyes, too, I do not know what he was doing. At the end the names of all the members are called over, and each in turn says how much spinning he has done during the day. It seems evident that Mr Gandhi believes that *laborare est orare*, or at least, that the two things are very intimately connected. The whole life of the *Ashram* is a life of ascetic discipline.

I happened to notice that, while the names were being called out and the record of the week's events read, Mr Gandhi enjoyed himself by stretching out his hand as if to catch one or two small infants who were running about near him, and when he did catch them they crowed with joy. I found it hard to feel that I was looking on one of the great souls who have shaken the world. He has not the "presence" of Tagore. Perhaps he could show it, but he prefers to keep his great soul veiled behind his marvellous humility. So what you see is a man full of simple human emotions, very quick to understand, with a genius for giving and inspiring trust. I did not notice the flashing or even the penetrating eye. His eyes have, indeed, a beautiful expression, and when he comes to the point of something he is saying he looks at you with a quick glance that is very direct, his eyes seem to say "Just that is what I mean, I hope you see." His face has the look of one who has undergone much spiritual conflict, but in his expression there is the peace that comes to those who have overcome.

Mr. Desai, Mr Gandhi's secretary, a very fine man, kindly arranged for me to have a talk with him at four the next afternoon. Needless to say I was impatient for the hour to come, and looked at my watch a good many times. But, having been in the East for some months, I thought it more polite to arrive five minutes late. When I appeared Mr Desai looked into Mr Gandhi's room, and then said to me "Do you mind waiting for a few minutes? He is not quite ready for you." That did not surprise me. What are ten or fifteen minutes to those who dwell in eternity?

But when I did go in his first words told me that he was no son of the East in the matter of time. "I am sorry to have kept you waiting," he said, "but at two minutes to four I asked if you had come, and when I found that you had not, I thought I had better have my milk" (he is on a very strict and plain diet) "so as to save time and give us more time for a good talk." Two minutes to four, indeed! And to save time! But there was not a suggestion of impatience in his tone of voice, just a simple, friendly explanation of his seeming lack of punctuality and of immediate hospitality to the invited guest.

He was sitting on the ground and spinning, also, as, he explained, as he liked to be fully occupied all the time it would not interfere with his freedom to talk and to listen. I essayed to sit on the ground, too, but he preferred that I should sit on a bench. Once or

twice while he talked he broke his thread, and explained what a delicate touch is needed for the expert spinner, and how poor an expert he himself still was

I asked him what his policy was and what he meant by "Prohibition" He wants immediate prohibition of the import and sale of foreign liquor All over the country, he says, there is a strong anti-liquor sentiment, and hardly anyone defends the liquor habit Foreign liquor is chiefly drunk by people who like to ape Europeans, and they are ashamed of it in the presence of their fellow countrymen But opium is rather different He would bring it under medical control instead of having opium shops, and every bit of revenue should be put into a fund for propaganda against opium and for improving medical facilities or other measures essential to its ultimate suppression apart from strict medical requirements

Then I told him there was another matter, more personal to myself, that I wanted to speak about, but perhaps I had stayed long enough However, he was insistent that I should stay a little longer, so I put my "concern" before him Perhaps I ought to explain that during these last weeks I have suffered more and more from the sense that no Indian seems now to believe in the possibility that we British as a people can ever understand their needs or meet them with generous, humble sympathy Again and again I have



been pleading—wherever I dared to plead—for patience, urging them to try to believe, even in the face of all they see, that the light can come, even into our proud British hearts. But they cannot believe it. And I have comforted myself with the thought. There is one Indian who will understand, Mr Gandhi will see how an Englishman still has faith that his countrymen will see the right thing and do it—if only it is put to them in a way that will open their eyes. He who has shown such faith in his fellow countrymen that he thought them able to overcome evil without violence, who after many bitter disappointments still has faith in his own people, still strives and struggles to purify their national life who refuses to be embittered or discouraged by their failure to respond this man will understand. And he did.

I asked him what was my duty as an Englishman on my return to England. At first, not seeing what was in my mind, he replied “well, first we want you to get off our backs. His use of that sharp expression wounded me. It was what every other Indian had conveyed to me, but none quite so sharply. Perhaps he thought I, as an Englishman, would only understand an expression of that kind. Like other Indians I have met, his intuition worked a little too quickly, so that he overshot the mark. Yet I was glad afterwards to think that he had said that. It left no doubt of his sustained belief that the political subjection

of India must first be ended Unlike some other Indians I have met, he very quickly perceived what I really meant that I accepted that first demand without difficulty, but that the difficulty arose in considering how the mind of Britain could be so changed as to perceive that we have become a burden on the back of India, and that we need not be and must not be so

I felt that I was doing too much of the talking, but he was most sympathetic He warmly agreed that the real change needed is moral rather than just political, that we British have to learn national humility, and put aside the thought that we have some national destiny to show other people how to live He readily understood how keen an Englishman must be that his country should do right because it is right, and not just because of the pressure of events And, what I cared for most, he seemed to be able to believe that the mind of Britain might change Once I noticed he quoted Tolstoy, but I do not now remember the sense of the quotation When we had talked for nearly an hour Mr Desai appeared and I left.

Next morning, when I came from my early breakfast, Mr Gandhi was cutting up vegetables at a table, so I said he ought to give me a job like that to do "Oh well," he said, "if you want to do this you must come in time, you must be here at a quarter-past six" So for the remaining three mornings I cut up vegetables with him from six to seven The first morning he

began by saying that it must seem strange to me as an Englishman that he sat in a chair while the ladies (there were three of them at work) stood up. Of course I told him that I understood that he was bound to sit because of his health, but we had a nice talk about Eastern and Western standards of men's treatment of women, and especially the different ways in which we express the companionship of man and wife. I never spoke to Mrs. Gandhi, though she does speak a little English. I believe she several times told people in the kitchen to offer me more milk or what not, and she "took notice" when I was saying good-bye. She is a motherly woman, who is, I should think, a very good *hausfrau*, and she looks as if she had shared pretty fully the burdens that have fallen upon her husband's back. Yet I never saw them even exchange a glance. All the same I am sure they know what is in one another's mind.

The children at Sabarmati are obviously very happy, and the centre of their happiness is "Bapu" himself. Each day some of them accompany him on his walk. He marches briskly along with half a dozen children dancing along beside him, and the favoured one of the day (each in turn, I fancy) holds his hand.

The last morning during the vegetable cutting we discussed the difficult problem of Assam and its opium. He is pessimistic. He fears Assam cannot get rid

of opium without financial assistance from the central Government—that is to say, until military expenditure is reduced. As I was going he asked me to write to him whenever I had anything to write about, and he suggested my sending any criticisms concerning defects I had noticed in the *ashram*. My mind immediately turned to the absence of silence in the times of prayer—though what I said was that I was in no position to judge after such a short visit. “Oh yes,” he said, “for instance, you may have noticed this wet patch where people wash their hands after meals. We are so stingy that we have never had it properly drained. But I am hoping to see how to do it soon.” What a mind he has for details. No wonder some Indians think him very Western.

Part of a letter written to me by Mr Gandhi subsequently has an interesting bearing on this incident, and I think I may quote it. “You seem to think lightly of my having invited suggestions with reference to sanitary matters. In my own humble opinion we needlessly divide life into water-tight compartments, religious and other. Whereas if a man has true religion in him, it must show itself in the smallest details of life. To me sanitation in a community such as ours is based upon common spiritual effort. The slightest irregularity in sanitary, social, and political life is a sign of spiritual poverty. It is a sign of

inattention, neglect of duty. Anyway, the *ashram* life is based upon this conception of fundamental unity of life ”

Mr Gandhi is a most lovable man. He makes it easy for a newcomer to treat him as an old friend, and I think he likes to be so treated instead of as a saint. After all, if he liked to be treated as a saint, he would not be one. He insisted on shaking hands when we parted, though he knew by then that I understood something of Indian ways \*

( 1929 )

\* Reproduced from *The Indian Ferment*, by courtesy of the author

## HIS PERSONALITY

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REGINALD A REYNOLDS

The moment that I had been waiting for so many months came unexpectedly. I knew that Mr Gandhi had arrived at the Ashram ( seminary ) late the previous night, and had caught a dim glimpse of him and heard his voice at the morning prayer. But I was busy in the study of the weaver's art when his " Well, Stranger ! " made me turn round sharply. I knew who it must be !

I was quite prepared for the lack of " distinction " in the old man's face. I was not prepared for anything quite so typical of the minister's gallery in one of our own Friends' Meetings. Such a dear old man, with his bald head and spectacles, beaky nose, and bird-like lips, with his benign but somewhat toothless smile, I have seen perched at the head of many a silent gathering, and when he spoke there was the same mixture of sense and sobriety and shrewd but economical humour. Kindly, practical, sensible, unemotional—the good man's character was obvious immediately, so far as its general lines were concerned.

But of that other thing that gives him power over people and draws them like a magnet from all parts of the country just to look at him, I could see no trace,

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nor have I got any more light on the matter in the days that have since elapsed. It cannot be his intellect, for though his common sense is acute he is anything but a genius. I suspect it is the simplest and rarest of things—his absolute sincerity.

This first impression of the outstanding characteristic of the Mahatma has been confirmed in the weeks that have followed. He carries his sincerity to the point of bluntness or rudeness if you like, that would shock my Quaker relations, though I should add that he couples it with a simple courtesy of manner that makes the difference between an insult and a reproof. It is typical of him that he dislikes dyed cloth—it is dishonest, he says, because it does not show the dirt. He himself always dresses in white khaddar which is washed daily.

His scorching passion for truth is almost terrifying—I am always afraid that I shall lapse into one of those silly social lies that we Westerners tell so glibly when we are afraid to give offence or wish to avoid a long explanation, and that he will see through it. He gives to each one who comes in contact with him the impression of a real personal affection, but he can sever every attachment without a sign of pain. They say that when Maganlal Gandhi died he was the coolest man at the Ashram, and ordained "Business as usual" and harder work to make up for the loss of so good a worker.

His conversation, speeches and writings are unemotional, logical, precise, and less involved than is usual with Indians. You will find a sort of measured wit and choice metaphor, but never bombast or sentimentality, fine writing or any clever tactics that the plain man cannot understand. Hard facts he combines with high ideals, but has no use either for rhetoric or a despondent "realism". He has aptly described himself as a practical idealist ... He is one of the few people I have ever met who understand that true toleration does not mean vacuity or sitting on the fence. His opinions are strong, and with some, notably those on sex and other sociological questions, I personally cannot agree. I look on him as I would a great Catholic saint, admiring whole-heartedly his character and spiritual power, whilst judging his views with complete detachment (always remembering that a vagabond's opinion of a saint is a piece of sheer impertinence).

He never misses his daily hour at the spinning wheel or the long morning and evening prayers. And he is still at the service of everyone, from the delegates of a trade dispute down to Reginald Reynolds or the nonentity of a non-conformist missionary who once wanted a good three-quarters of an hour of his time in telling Mr. Gandhi about himself.

It is a strange thing, but since I have been away from him for a few weeks travelling about India



on my own before settling down again at the Ashram for a time, I have felt Gandhi's personality more than I did when with him. I always respected him, but now I feel much more strongly about him.

Fate is forcing his hand. His own desire turns increasingly towards intensive work among the peasants—khaddar, temperance, anti-opium, anti-untouchability, etc.

But now I see him, a pathetic and tragic figure, drawn by circumstances over which he has no control into a position from which there is no turning back. Other people's stupidity has produced the crisis, and the country looks to him to see it through.

At this terrible moment, when the prison walls are already as it seems closing round him, and when prison probably means death in prison, I do want people, even those who have failed to understand this last move of his, to give him the full credit that is due to his true, noble, generous soul. Say what you will of his judgment, his courage and integrity have never shone so brightly.

His last letter lies before me as I write. I had asked him what I could do to help him, and it is typical of his courtesy that in the midst of all his activities he found a minute to reply. "The real thing," he writes, "is not likely to begin before March. I know you are doing your work in a thorough manner.

Come when you can." He says he has been thinking about my letter for the last three days, which I hope means that he has a place for me in his scheme of things. Finally, he reminds me that the Ashram is my home to come to whenever I like

I no longer wonder at the devotion of the blind masses. Rather am I one with them. If other reasons were lacking, I would follow such a captain for his pure chivalry alone, and so would all the world if they knew him.\*

(1930)

## 88 KNIGHTSBRIDGE, LONDON

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AGATHA HARRISON

Until September 1931 few people had noticed this house. Then suddenly it leaped into fame over night, for it became the headquarters of Mahatma Gandhi and his staff during the second Round Table Conference. In the well-known hotels of Mayfair, several of his colleagues had taken luxurious suites. But this man had elected to live in the East End, among the people he understood—the poor—and accepted the invitation of Kingsley Hall, Bow, to stay there. This made it exceedingly awkward for his colleagues, as Bow is some five or six miles from the Conference centre, and the talks that were necessary at all times of the day and night required his presence at a more central place. So Mr. Gandhi was prevailed upon to have a  *pied à terre*  nearer to St James's Palace, and 88 Knightsbridge was taken.

I do not think Mr Gandhi was ever really happy about this arrangement. He would acknowledge its convenience, but the cost of it all was an ever-present anxiety. For you cannot be in Knightsbridge without paying its price, and this price represented to Mr Gandhi food for starving people in India. The only time the two devoted friends, C F Andrews and Mr

Gandhi, had a difference of opinion in these days, was over this house. Mr Andrews felt, naturally, that no expense should be spared to conserve the strength and time of his friend for the momentous work he was called on to do, Mr Gandhi continued to worry about the money. He insisted on going back to Bow for his scanty hours of sleep, but at other times when the Conference was not in session, Mr Gandhi was to be found at 88.

Before long the house was full to overflowing. C. F. Andrews had a sky parlour, and gave all his energy and time to helping his friend. In the odd minutes he worked on his book, "What I owe to Christ." Some of the chapters were dictated over and over again to me in the midst of these hectic days, and then taken upstairs for revision. In a previous article (The Christian Century, September 28, 1932) the part he played in getting Mr Gandhi to London has been described, and now he set to work to make this visit of value in a variety of ways.

Then there was Mrs Cheesman. She had helped Mr Gandhi in South African days, and now came again to the help of her friend, putting aside all her many responsibilities to give him her expert assistance. Mrs Cheesman is the sister of Henry Polak, who had been in prison with Mr Gandhi in South Africa—a devoted friend of India. Mrs Polak's book on Mr Gandhi is a revelation of those dramatic South African days,

and should be widely read Dr S K. Datta and his gracious wife also made this their headquarters, the latter acting as hostess for our family Horace Alexander, of Woodbrooke settlement, Birmingham, was another invaluable member of the group Only those living in the house will ever know of his effective background work There were hosts of others who came and went

It is almost impossible to describe our household. Perhaps the best way is to tell of some of the chief actors in that drama First and foremost the Mahatma

Personally, I find it difficult to make a critical estimate of this man For when you meet absolute honesty and directness of purpose in a tangled world, you are in the presence of something that silences criticism. I can see how difficult he makes the path of governments, for real sincerity and directness are embarrassing, and I sometimes wished he could make more allowance for this He is the most disconcerting person to work with, but very human and lovable How he can work in the midst of so much turmoil, is amazing He is rarely alone The only time I saw him left by himself, was after the famous session at the end of the Conference when the Prime Minister had announced the policy of the government (later incorporated in a White Paper) and Mr Gandhi had given his serious answer foreshadowing what lay ahead He came back to 88 immediately after,

and sat by the fire spinning in silence. Watching him from the other end of the room, I was reminded of Atlas carrying an intolerable burden on frail shoulders.

The Mahatma does not believe in closed doors. The most important talks were carried on with a variety of men and women listening. Cables and letters could be seen lying about—he trusts people entirely. Just before Mr. Gandhi left for India he asked me if I would take on an impossible task—that of working on “the mutual understanding” between our two countries. This conversation started with Mr. Gandhi, Horace Alexander and me, but soon a group of people was sitting around while arrangements, financial and otherwise, were carried on, and the Mahatma questioned me closely on how I lived and at what cost!

At the time of his fast, feeling I needed the advice of this man on the work I was called on to do, I cabled to him. In a few hours his answer came from Yeravda jail. “Understand your struggle. God will guide your step.”

Then there was Mahadev Desai, Mr. Gandhi's secretary. The world should know about him for he is a strategic figure in the Indian situation, and the right-hand man of the Mahatma. At present he is with him in Yeravda Jail. I asked Mahadev how he came into the national movement, and he told me

that many years ago he had heard Mr Gokhale, on his return from South Africa, talk about the Mahatma. An expression he used concerning the power of Mr Gandhi arrested him, for Mr Gokhale said "This man can make heroes out of common clay." Mahadev Desai determined to learn more of a man who had such power, and the result is that he is now one of the chief men on whom Mr. Gandhi relies.

Before Mahadev Desai left for India he asked me to help him buy a present for his small son, and showed me a photo of both of them taken at the ashram at Ahmedabad. A dear little man about five years of age, with the embarrassingly direct gaze that children so often have. We went to Harrod's store, close by 88, for it is famed for its children's toys. Though many of the things Mahadev saw intrigued him, he was troubled by the lavish display. I knew that a wealthy friend had put a sum of money at his disposal, and suggested that he buy one of the toys for his child. I shall not forget his expression as he said "How can I buy that toy for my son when other children have not enough to eat?" I hastily led him to Woolworth's store, where we bought a sixpenny paint box and painting book for the little son. Did he get this paint box, I wonder, before his father was imprisoned?

Mahadev Desai was also the keeper of the common purse, and a more meticulous care of money I have never seen in any organization for which I have worked.

Devadas Gandhi, the Mahatma's son, should come next. He bears little outward resemblance to his famous father, except perhaps in his radiant smile. He is a charmer, and made a deep impression here, for he is such a friendly person, yet a keen politician. He with the others took his place alongside Mr. Gandhi, attending the sessions of the Conference, and doing a variety of other tasks. Shortly after they left, I happened to go into a dairy near by 88, and they asked affectionately after him, very distressed to hear that he was in prison.

Another of the lieutenants Mr. Gandhi brought with him was the gentle, clever Pyarelal, a lover of books and music, and a dreamer. He too had given up his career in order to follow the apostle of non-violence. He and I worked closely together, and from him I learned much about the stern discipline that being a follower of the Mahatma entails. On one occasion a letter could not be found that Mr. Gandhi wanted. This was not surprising, considering the mountainous correspondence that engulfed us each day, and the inadequate staff to cope with it. After many hours of search, I suggested we give it up. But Pyarelal replied, "It will have to be found, you cannot give that answer to Mahatmajī." And sure enough, after two days' search, it was found! In between our work Pyarelal talked to me about India, and of his family and friends—of his elderly mother



who had joined the Congress movement, of his sister training to be a doctor. Later I read of the arrest of his mother, and had a letter from his sister in which she told me of the effect of the ordinances on the lives of the people. "Soon our *thoughts* will come under the ordinances," she wrote That sentence haunts me

(At this moment Pyarelal and Devadas are released from jail but expect to be re-arrested at any moment )

Then Bernard Aluwihare. Unlike the others, he had been in this country before, for he studied at Oxford, and had many friends. One of his tasks at 88 was to attend to the telephone, and he dealt with that insistent instrument in a unique way. It never stopped ringing, and momentous, as well as stupid, messages came through. Little wonder that he sometimes treated the people at the other end in a rather cavalier fashion. An important call might come from Whitehall, and the next minute some pressman wanted to know whether it was true that Mr. Gandhi was going to meet the King clad only in his loin cloth. "No," I heard him explain patiently, "Mr. Gandhi is going to wear striped trousers and a black coat!" Needless to say, this conversation ended abruptly. One day when sending an important cable for Mr. Gandhi over the 'phone, and being asked to "spell it please", I heard him use this telephone alphabet G. for God, A for Ass, N for No one, D. for Donkey,

H for Hell, I for Idiot    Then he put down the receiver with his infectious grin

Of course he sometimes treated a high official in this inconsequential fashion, with embarrassing results But he certainly added to the zest of life, this charming debonair lad    He also was arrested soon after he reached India

And finally Miraben — Miss Slade    She is the daughter of an admiral, and gave up her life of leisure to become a disciple of the Mahatma    Many tales had preceded her coming, few sympathetic, and some insensitive and vulgar    I was eager to meet this woman, but was frankly unprepared for the serene, poised person I found a few days after their arrival, busy sweeping out Mr Gandhi's cell at Kingsley Hall    We soon became friends, and in the weeks that followed, I saw much of her    One day I asked if she had any regrets in coming back to her old setting, and shall not forget her expression as she told me that, on the contrary, when she decided to take this step, she felt as though she had "come home"    She strenuously avoided all publicity, though reporters were hard on her tracks    She spoke at only a few meetings, but always left her mark    If her family wanted to see her, they had to come to 88, and sit in a small pantry and talk, while she prepared Mr Gandhi's simple food

One incident I specially remember    We both went to a large reception given to the Conference

delegates at the Lyceum Club, the scene of many brilliant gatherings. As she handed her plain khaddar blanket to the cloakroom attendant, to be placed alongside the velvet and fur wraps of other women, she said: "The last time I was in this club, I was a member." It is difficult to describe this woman, except to use her own words—that her spirit had found its "home." Now she is serving her second term of imprisonment in a Bombay jail.

The picture would not be complete without mention of the two detectives attached by the government to guard the frail body of Mr. Gandhi. This particular pair are generally detailed to shadow royalty. Though accustomed to watch for the sinister side of life, their work now took a different turn. They grew to love "the little man" as they affectionately called him; he became their friend for whom they would do any service. They also lent a willing hand to the rest of us when we were extra busy.

Before Mr. Gandhi left London, when asked by a government official if there was anything more he could do for him, Mr. Gandhi requested that his two detectives might go with him as far as Brindisi. When asked why, the Mahatma replied, "Because they are part of my family." This request was granted, and they accompanied him across the continent.

In the pockets of these men, going about their strange work, are the watches sent them from India.

with the inscription "With love from M. K. Gandhi". What a tale these detectives could unfold if reminiscences of the doings of a criminal investigation officer were allowed to be written!

The two maids must have mention Under ordinary circumstances they would expect a reasonably houred day Yet they chearfully worked till all hours, answering the bell that never ceased ringing, and getting food for the family at odd hours.

Out of all the memories that crowd these days, it is difficult to make a selection Some stand out The evening prayers when the room would be crowded with people eager to learn more about this man's way of life. The early mornings when Mr Gandhi arrived, and you felt as though a torchlike "something" had come into the house. He would spring out of his car and be up in his room sitting by the fire spinning, in a flash In every corner of the room were famous sculptors and artists trying to get a model or picture of this elusive man Strewed around were letters and cables needing immediate attention, members of the Conference seated on the floor, anxious to get his opinion before the Conference session, men and women from all over the world waiting for a word from him, C. F. Andrews and Horace Alexander quietly working in the midst of it all, Mrs. Cheesman patiently waiting to take some important letter And in the centre of all this the imperturbable Mahatma. Then finding it

was time for the Conference, he would dart out to his car, followed by panting detectives, and some of his staff clutching the famous spinning wheel and the green rush basket containing his food

Another outstanding memory is the evening when Bishop Fisher of America bridged the Atlantic by telephone from Chicago, begging the Mahatma to come to the States. Mr. Gandhi insisted on taking this call himself, though C F Andrews and I stood by in case he could not hear, as he so rarely uses the telephone. The press waited outside eager to catch what was said. But Mr. Gandhi soon ended this expensive conversation, for again his mind was worried about the cost, and what the money meant in terms of starving people.

There were amusing incidents. Miraben, for example, finding that someone had taken the special celery saved for Mr. Gandhi's lunch, and trying to find the culprit. They laughingly blamed C F Andrews for this.

Indescribable days, filled to the brim with hard work, vital interest and laughter, and a surge of people that came and went. I wish we had kept a visitors' book that there might be a record of the politicians, religious leaders, and men and women of every shade of opinion who crowded the passages of 88. Did our country realise the significance of this figure in its midst? The press headlined the fact that he met Charlie Chaplin and Bernard Shaw, and that he dared to go to

Buckingham Palace in his famous loin cloth. But little notice was taken of the ominous things he said at the Conference, the truth of which we are now experiencing "Thou knewest not the time of thy visitation," I overheard one of our family remark I am afraid this is true

The third Round Table Conference is now in session here in London By the time this appears in print its fate will be known But while these deliberations are going on, the chief person in this Indian drama is "detained at His Majesty's pleasure" in Yeravda jail, without trial "Gandhi reigning over India from within British prison walls," as someone has remarked

Ten or twenty years hence a tablet will probably be placed over the door of 88 Knightsbridge "Mr Gandhi made his headquarters here, when he attended the Round Table Conference in 1931"† Today, some of us passing that house see a question in letters of flame "What have you done with Mr Gandhi?"

† During the war this block of houses was demolished

• Published in *Christian Century* in 1932

# WHAT I SAW IN GANDHI

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JOHN HAYNES HOLMES

Texts (1) "It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom Howbeit .. . the half was not told me"—1 Kings 10 6-7.

(2) "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared before the face of all people"—Luke 2 29-31

These are the texts which I have chosen to introduce a sermon which is not really a sermon at all. What I have to say to you this morning is only a personal narrative—a little story out of my own life. I have met Gandhi—have clasped his hand, have looked into his eyes, have listened to his voice. I have sat in a great public audience, and heard him speak, I have sat alone at his feet and talked with him about many things. All this is of no importance, except to myself. But I have talked to you so often about the Mahatma, and you have responded so generously to my admirations and love for this great man whom we have learned together to describe as "the greatest man in the world", that I feel I should be remiss in my duty if I did not share with you, so far as I am able, an experience which I shall ever regard as the most precious of my life.

Furthermore, there are wider implications in my experience! I saw Gandhi at the climatic hour of his career, and against the background of events momentous in the history not only of our own but of all time. I can tell you, therefore, not only of my impressions of the man, but also of my estimate of his significance today for India, the Empire, and the world. I have met, in other words, not merely an individual, but a cause, a movement, a revolution. How do I feel about this phenomenon—this Word become flesh which dwells among us “full of grace and truth”—this incarnation of the Spirit in which is life, and this life “the light of men”?

I was in Berlin when I heard that Gandhi was coming to London. Earlier in the summer I had received from him a letter in which he had spoken of his journey, and of his expectation of seeing me on his arrival. But his plans had been thrown into confusion, and he had announced that he would not attend the Round Table Conference. Then came the agreement with the Viceroy, and the sudden determination to make the trip. The moment I heard that Gandhi was coming, that he had actually taken ship and was on the sea, I abandoned all my other arrangements and rushed to London, resolved to camp upon the Mahatma's threshold until the door might open and let me through. I had not dared to hope that I could greet him when he first landed upon English soil. But by a dramatic



and amusing combination of circumstances, which is a story in itself, I found myself on the morning of Saturday, September 12th, standing on the pier at Folkstone awaiting the arrival of the Channel steamer

It was typical English weather—cold and foggy, with occasional heavy showers. The wind was sweeping the waves with white-caps, and chilling the bones of the watchers on the pier. I was talking with an officer, one of the members of the police force appointed to be the bodyguard of the Mahatma.

“Do you see that point of land over there?” he said to me, pointing to the white cliffs of Dover to the north. “That’s where Caesar landed when he brought his legions to conquer England.”

To conquer England! I thought of the great soldier of ancient Rome and of his victories upon these shores. His Twentieth Legion had remained here three hundred years. Then I thought of another conqueror—William of Normandy—who had crossed this Channel a thousand years after the immortal Julius and beaten the Saxons and annexed their realm. This invader had landed at Pevensey, not so many miles here to the south. And now another thousand years had passed, and still another conqueror was crossing these stormy seas. Not a soldier, but a mightier than any soldier. Not an invader with a sword of steel, but an apostle with the sword of the spirit. Not an enemy to lay waste the land, but

a friend to surprise and devastate the hearts of Englishmen. If ever Britain was in peril, it was in peril now, when for the third time in two thousand years, there was coming an alien to dictate terms of peace.

I wiped the rain from my glasses, and gazed out through the mist to the open sea. There was the steamer, a little craft in white, emerging from the horizon like a sheeted ghost. As she made fast at the pier, only one man, the official representative of the British Government, was allowed on board. All the rest of us — friends of Gandhi, delegates from India, the Dean of Canterbury, newspaper reporters and photographers — were left standing in the rain, with a great crowd of sight-seers behind the barriers. But the delay was brief. In a few moments we were aboard the ship, and I was standing at the door of Gandhi's cabin awaiting my turn to be received. It was here I had my first glimpse of the Mahatma. He was sitting cross-legged upon his berth, in earnest conversation with Reginald Reynolds, a young English Quaker, who had been a resident at the Ashram in India and had become famous as the bearer of Gandhi's letter to the Viceroy on the eve of the march to Dandi. Gandhi's legs were bare, his body wrapped to the neck in the ample folds of a khaddai shawl. His head and shoulders were bent forward in a listening attitude. A naked arm, long and lean and wiry, reached out of the

shawl and took a paper from Reynolds' hand. There was a quick interchange of words, a fitting smile, and the conference was over

It was now my turn. I stepped into the little cabin. Instantly Gandhi jumped to his feet, and with the lithe quick step of a school-boy, came forward to greet me. I felt his hands take mine in a grasp as firm as that of an athlete. I saw his eyes shining with a light so bright that not even the thick glass of his rude spectacles could obscure their radiance. I heard his voice addressing me in tones as rich and full as they were gentle. We had a few precious moments together. I was confused and excited, and today have little memory of what was said. But at this first meeting it was not words but feelings that were important. I was in the presence of the man whose spirit had reached me, years before, across the continents and seas of half the world, and now this presence was stamping its indelible impression upon *my mind*.

What was this first impression of Gandhi, as distinguished from the others which came later? I do not find it difficult to answer this question. It was an impression of the beauty of the man. Where do people get the idea that Gandhi is ugly? Why have they described him as a "dwarf" and "little monkey of a man"? It is true that his limbs and body are emaciated—his ascetic life produces no surplus flesh. But his frame is large, and his stature erect and of

medium height, I have seen many Indians who are much more insignificant in appearance than Mahatma Gandhi. It is true also that his individual features are not lovely. He has a shaven head, protruding ears, thick lips, and a mouth that is minus many of its teeth. But his dark complexion is richly beautiful against the white background of his shawl, his eyes shine like candles in the night, and over all is the radiance of a smile like sunshine on a morning landscape. What impresses you is not the physical appearance but the spiritual presence of this man. You think at once of his simplicity, his sincerity, his innocence. He approaches you with all the naturalness and spontaneity of a little child. There is not an atom of self-consciousness in Gandhi—in spite of all his greatness in the world and all the adulation which has been heaped upon him, he has no pose, no pretentiousness, no pride. You realize at once that his peculiar aspects of appearance and his peculiar ways of life have nothing fraudulent about them, but are the honest and fearless expression of a transcendent personality. Therefore you do not think of how he looks, but only of what he is. You see Truth, in other words, shining through the imperfect garment of the flesh. It is this which makes Gandhi beautiful. For truth is beauty! You remember how John Keats told us this in the closing lines of his great "Ode to a Grecian Urn", when he wrote

Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all  
Ye know and all ye need to know

In a few moments we were off the boat, and started for London. Gandhi was in the official automobile of the Government, guarded by police. I rode in a compartment of the train with Devadas Gandhi, the Mahatma's son, Mr Pyarelal, one of his secretaries, and Miss Madeleine Slade, the English girl, now known as Mirabai, his servant and disciple.

We were soon in London, and went immediately through the mud and rain to the Friends' Meeting House, where a great audience had gathered to meet and welcome Gandhi. As I saw him enter this auditorium, I was impressed again by the beauty of his personality, and now also by its power. With what dignity he walked upon this platform, with what serenity he surveyed this English scene; with what command he took possession of these men and women! To an intruder who knew nothing of Gandhi, nor of the momentous character of the occasion, there might have been something ridiculous in the picture. Here was this Indian striding into the room with his feet bare, his legs naked to the thighs, his middle bound by the loin-cloth, his body wrapped and rewrapped in the ample folds of his khaddar shawl. But as he took his seat, and sat there calm and motionless as Buddha, the ridiculous, if it ever was present, was straightway diffused and dissolved into the sublime. I shall never

forget the sense of awe that settled like an atmosphere upon that room. For the first time I understood the secret of Gandhi's influence over the millions of his fellow-countrymen. Had a king been present, we could not have felt more reverence in his presence. Suddenly I found myself remembering the testimony of Mr Bernays, a sensitive English journalist, who said - "The moment you see Gandhi, you catch the atmosphere of royalty." And I remembered also that a few weeks before I had been in the presence of royalty. I had seen and talked with the man who, for more than thirty years, had been the most brilliant monarch of his day. This man was nobly dressed, attended by his court, himself a fascinating, gracious and splendid figure. But not all the majesty of this king could match the royal air of Gandhi.

But Gandhi not only looked like a king, he spoke like a king. His words that afternoon were gently uttered, in a voice quiet, almost monotonous. But as they reached our ears, they were the words of a royal proclamation. He made three points clear. First, his credentials! He came to England, he said, not as an individual, but as the representative of his people. "I represent, without any fear of contradiction, the dumb semi-starved millions of India." Secondly, his mandate! He came not to dicker or to bargain with Britain, but to present the terms of the All India Congress. "As an agent holding a power of attorney

from the Congress," he said, "I shall have my limitations. I have to conduct myself within the four corners of the mandate I have received from the Congress. If I am to be loyal to the trust which has been put in me, I must not go outside that mandate." Lastly, his goal! What did the mandate exact? "Freedom," said Gandhi. "The Congress wants freedom unadulterated for these dumb and semi-starved millions." No compromise here, no equivocation! "He spoke as one having authority"—and with the voice of prophecy

This was on a Saturday afternoon. On the successive five days that I was privileged to remain in London, I saw the Mahatma four separate times. The first time was on the following morning, Sunday, when I went bright and early to Kingsley Hall, the settlement-house in the east end of London where Gandhi had characteristically taken up his abode. He was on an open terrace just outside his room, which was a kind of cell some five feet wide, and seven or eight feet long, with stone floor and bare walls, and furnished only with a table, a chair, and a thin pallet on the floor where Gandhi slept. Mirabai was washing the one window of the little room. The Mahatma was sitting on a chair, bathed in the warm sunshine of a perfect day. He was talking with one of the great leaders of Indian affairs. Within a few moments this conference was finished, and I came and sat down in a

chair beside the Mahatma. We talked of the Round Table Conference—was it going to succeed? No, Gandhi saw no reason for believing that it would succeed. His mind told him it must fail. "But God has told me to come to England," he said, very simply, "and He must have His own reasons. So I have put my mind aside, and shall trust and hope until the end." I referred to the slanderous attacks upon him in certain of the London newspapers, and expressed the hope that they did not trouble him. "No," he said, "they do not trouble me, but they pain me terribly. Think of how fully and freely I have talked to the reporters. I have told them everything. And yet they print these slanders and vicious lies. It hurts me to think that such things can be done. But," he continued with a smile, "I do not let them worry me. They do no harm. Nothing can injure truth." I then referred to the next day, Monday, which was his day of silence, and asked if he would attend the Conference. "Oh, yes," he said, with his delightful smile now become almost a laugh, "I shan't say a word, but think what a chance I shall have to listen." We talked of a few other matters, and then I arose with an apology that I had taken his time, for others were waiting to see him, as indeed they always are. I shall never forget the loveliness of his smile, as he took my hand, and said "Come whenever you can. You may have to wait, but I want to see you as long as you are in London."



I next saw Gandhi on Sunday night at a religious service in which his friends and some men and women from the neighbourhood participated. The Mahatma sat on the platform, not in a chair but on the floor, wrapped in a shawl, with a rug thrown about his bare legs. He spoke to us, from his sitting posture, on prayer,—his experience of prayer. He stated that he believed in God, and therefore of course prayed. He told us what prayer had done for him. "Without prayer," he said, "I could do nothing." As he went on in his quiet way, telling us of his experience, with this most intimate discipline of the spiritual life, his voice became very soft and low. I doubt if many persons in the room, back of the front rows where I was sitting, could hear what he was saying. The Mahatma seemed more and more to sink into himself. His address became a process of self-communion, or communion, right there before our eyes, with One greater than ourselves. But words were not necessary at such an hour! Gandhi's presence was diffusing an atmosphere in the little room which gripped us in its spell. It was a moment of mystic uplift never to be forgotten.

I did not see Gandhi again until Wednesday night, when I sat with him in his room during his supper-hour. He was sitting on his bed, on the floor. I squatted down beside him, that I might be as near to him as possible. He held in his left hand a cup of

goat's milk On his lap was a tin plate, such as I have seen convicts use in a prison, and in this was the handful of dates which made the substance of his meal Gandhi's Secretary, Mr Pyarelal, was with us but did not join in the conversation We talked of many things—of the Round Table Conference, of Mayor Walker's request for an interview, of Palestine and Zionism and their relation to the situation in India, and of the Mahatma's projected visit to America At the close I bade him good-bye, for I was leaving on Friday and did not expect to see him again Immediately he laid aside his cup and plate, and took my hand in both of his "We shall meet again," he said, "in America or perhaps in India But if we never meet, we shall still be together"

The next night, Thursday, Devadas Gandhi sought me out and told me, to my surprise, that his father wanted to see me The Mahatma was at St James's Palace, where the Round Table Conference held its sessions I hastened with Devadas to the Palace, and found Gandhi in one of the committee rooms, eating his supper He was sitting on a large lounge, or divan, and he invited me to sit down beside him A message had come from America, and he wanted to discuss it with me We talked for a half-hour or so, as members of Gandhi's party passed in and out of the room Then, on word that the attendants were waiting to close the Palace, we all arose and started

for the automobiles. Gandhi asked me if I would ride with him to Kingsley Hall. Of course I accepted his invitation, and sat by his side as we sped far eastward to the slum districts of the city. As we drew up to the house, we found the doorway blocked with a great crowd of children. The boys and girls of the neighbourhood had become much excited over this strange man from India. In the morning they gathered in the street to see him drive away, and in the evening to see him come home again. This night it was late, but they were still there. And what a shout they raised as he emerged from the automobile! The Mahatma passed and turned toward the children with a smiling face. They shouted again, and crowded about him to touch his hands and feel his shawl. I bade him a hasty good-bye, as he sought his room. And as I went down the narrow street, with the children's voices ringing in my ears, I thought of the story of one of Galilee, who said "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven."

Well, this is my story of meeting Gandhi—a simple story, of little interest, I should imagine, to anybody but myself. But there are elements in it of wider range than the limits of my own personal experience. I have met a man who is more than a man—a great historic figure, of supreme importance for our own and all future time. What is the

permanent impression that I gathered of his qualities, and of the relation of these qualities to the world crisis in which they are acting as decisive factors?

First of all, may I say that Gandhi fulfilled, and more than fulfilled, all the expectations that I had gathered of him through years of study and inquiry? He was the man I expected to see. I can say of him what the Queen of Sheba said to Solomon in our text "It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit the half was not told me." Immediately apparent was the charm of the man—a charm which is irresistible to all who meet him, friend and foe alike. I doubt if anybody can come into the radiance of that presence, and not feel himself melting like snow beneath an April sun. But charm, of course, is no mere surface quality. It reaches deep into the soul. It is like a blossom, all fragrance and beauty, which draws its sustenance from the soil of mother earth. Gandhi has charm without, because within he has infinite resources of gentleness, tenderness, and sweet compassion. This man is animated by love—a love which reaches out to all the world and includes every humblest creature within its embrace. His courtesy is exquisite because his love is instant. He is the living incarnation of a soul at peace with all its fellows.

All this, of course, I expected to find. The charm of Gandhi's person, radiating from the love of Gandhi's

heart, has become the commonplace of every report of the man that has been written. But there are other qualities which are not so apparent—qualities which surprised me as elements of character and influence that I had not anticipated.

First, I would mention his extraordinary physical stamina. As an ascetic he is frail, yet he has powers of resistance and endurance that are remarkable. I feared for him the chill blasts of England's rainy weather beating upon an ill-protected body which had just come from India's heat. But Gandhi seemed to suffer not at all from exposure, and was the one person who worried not at all. Then there is his capacity to bear up through hours of uninterrupted labour. At four o'clock in the morning, he rises for an hour of solitary prayer. Then comes a rapid walk through the silent streets followed by breakfast, conferences with his secretaries, and interviews. At ten o'clock he speeds to the Round Table, where he is busy all day long with meetings and discussion. At seven o'clock, he conducts his evening prayers with his family and friends. Then come interviews and conferences, lasting frequently into the late hours of the night. Interspersed are his letters, his spinning, and other regular activities. How does Gandhi survive the routine of a day which frequently runs to nineteen and twenty hours in duration? Is it because of his hours of daily prayer? Is it because of his day

of silence on every Monday? Is it because of his rigid diet, which sustains his body and does not interfere with his mind? Answer these questions as you will, the fact remains that the Mahatma is a marvel of physical power. A newspaper correspondent recently wrote that he was "showing signs of strain." I do not believe it! Gandhi has long since delivered himself from the strain which breaks so many of us down.

Secondly, I would mention Gandhi's mental power. More than once I have declared that the great Indian was not remarkable in the field of the intellect. I was tempted to this conclusion, I imagine, because of the traditional difficulty of associating intellectual power with spiritual sanctity. Also, I was misled by the absence in Gandhi of that literary genius which was so extraordinary, for example, in Leo Tolstoy. But now I know that Gandhi, like Tolstoy, has a great intellect, even though it does not express itself in large works of the creative imagination. Indeed, I have seldom met such clarity of mind, such precision of thought, such instant and full control of the data of a problem, as I met in Gandhi. His knowledge of India and England, and of many other subjects of the first importance, is exhaustive, his use of this knowledge, in the presentation of ideas and the formulation of policies, is exhausting to those who must compete with him. In

the House of Commons he addressed the assembled members of the Labour Party. For two hours after his speech he was questioned relentlessly by these friendly but eager men. Like a stag at bay, he was harried by the hounds. But not once did he falter, least of all succumb. He was a match for them all, and at the end, in generous recognition of his victory in the battle of wits, was cheered to the echo by these solid Englishmen. Be not deceived, my friends! The Mahatma is as competent intellectually as he is devoted spiritually. In his leadership of India he is the rival of any statesman in the world today.

Next, I was surprised, and am still surprised, by a quality which I find it difficult to describe. I refer to a certain rigour, or relentlessness, in Gandhi's nature. We might call it hardness, if hardness were not for ever inconsistent with the gentleness which rules within the Mahatma's soul. What I have in mind is straightness of opinion, a rigidity of conviction, an almost fanatical fidelity of purpose, which holds him, as a rudder holds a ship to the course appointed. I detected this in his first speech in London, in response to his public welcome, which, in spite of its quietness of tone, was one of the 'bluntest' speeches I ever heard in my life. It was apparent in his first speech at the Round Table Conference, when he said to these officials of the King that there had been

a time when he had prided himself on being a British subject, but now he had ceased for many years to call himself a British subject "I would far rather be called a rebel than a subject" It was serenely manifest in his second speech at the Conference, when he looked around the Table, and said softly that he failed to see Indians who were representatives of the people of India Those he saw were representatives not of India but of the Crown Most of all was it manifest in his dramatic visit to Lancashire when, like Lincoln in burning Richmond at the close of the Civil War, he walked like a conqueror amid the said wreckage of his triumph. Stricken even as Lincoln was stricken, he still said, as he looked upon the hungry and wretched men and women in the Lancashire towns, that he could not forget the millions in his own country, who were far more hungry and wretched than these There is steel in Gandhi He may bend, as he has bent many a time to talk terms of peace, but he will never break The sword of his spirit is a pliant weapon, but it cuts ruthlessly to the heart of reality Gandhi is again like Jesus—one of the meek, to be sure, but "the terrible meek"

Lastly, may I speak of Gandhi's sense of humour, his light-heartedness, his capacity for joy Never have I seen a great man who can laugh so quickly and so heartily At the slightest excuse his merriment ripples like that of a little child This is what makes



his smile so potent—it comes not as a sudden and unexpected disclosure, but abides like an atmosphere of warmth and light. To me this happiness was at first disconcerting. How could this man, weighed down by the burdens of his country, faced at this moment by the greatest crisis in the Empire's history, with millions the world around waiting upon his every word and act, how could he abandon himself so utterly to the enjoyment of an amusing story or a grotesque incident? It seemed uncanny that he could laugh so heartily and amid events so momentous. Yet, as I thought about it, I seemed to understand. His merriment is a kind of doorway that opens straight to the secret places of Gandhi's soul. Why shouldn't he laugh—this man who is a Mahatma?

Thus Gandhi is free from all the myriad cares of the worldly life. He is beset by none of the worries which weigh down other men. He does not have to think of the next meal. He has no clothes nor adornments to bother him. He handles no money, and thus has none to lose. He owns no property, and therefore cannot be robbed. He is delivered, in other words, of all the cares that attach to the accumulation of the perishable things of the earth. He has not laid up for himself "treasure upon earth where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal;" but his treasures he has laid up "in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and

where thieves do not break through nor steal" His mind is easy because his heart is free

But more important than this is the fact that the Mahatma is a man who trusts in God. Strange as it may seem to us Westerners, with our materialistic modes of thought, Gandhi actually believes that he has found God in his prayers, and walks with Him in his actions. It is his conviction that God's will is manifest to those who seek Him, and that this will may be done by those who love Him. It is the doing of the will which is the great thing in Gandhi's eyes. What the consequences may be he leaves contentedly and confidently to Him who rules. In this Gandhi is faithful to his Hindu scriptures. For in the Bhagavadgita it is taught that the one concern of men is work, and that the fruitage of this work is in the hands of God. So Gandhi never worries, but only trusts. His confidence in eternity makes possible his happiness in time.

It is this which brings us face to face, in the end, with the power of Gandhi. "You are a strange man," said Mr. Lawrence Houseman, in his address of welcome at the Friends' Meeting House. "You are so sincere, you embarrass us, so simple, you baffle us." What, indeed, is to be done with such a man? If he came like ordinary men, it would be easy enough to handle him. If he bore a sword, a stouter sword would strike him down. If he had an army, a stronger army

would defeat him. Even as it was, I found myself wondering at times that Britain did not arrest the Mahatma, cast him into the Tower, and try him for treason. But this man comes naked and unafraid, protected only with "the shield of faith", armed only with "the sword of the spirit". How can such a man be beaten? Panoplied in cosmic law, how can he be overthrown? "Not by power, nor by might, but by my spirit, saith the Lord." Gandhi is irresistible, already a victor over his foes, because, like Shelley's Prometheus, he is glad.

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite,  
 To forgive wrongs darker than death or night,  
 To defy power which seems omnipotent,  
 To love, to bear, to hope till Hope creates  
 From its own wreck the thing it contemplates,  
 Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent —  
 This is to be good, great and joyous, beautiful  
 and free,

This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory \*

(1931)

\* A sermon delivered at New York after a meeting with Gandhi in London at the time of the second R. T. C.

## THE VOICE OF THE INDIAN PEOPLE

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JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

It should be remembered that the nationalist movement in India, like all nationalist movements, was essentially a bourgeois movement. It represented the natural historical urge of development, and to consider it or to criticize it as a working-class movement is wrong. Gandhi represented that movement and the Indian masses in relation to that movement to a supreme degree, and he became the voice of the Indian people to that extent. He functioned inevitably within the [orbit of nationalist ideology, but the dominating passion that consumed him was a desire to raise the masses. In this respect he was always ahead of the nationalist movement, and he gradually made it, within the limits of its own ideology, turn in this direction. Economic events in India and the world powerfully pushed Indian nationalism towards vital social changes, and today it hovers, somewhat undecided, on the brink of a new social ideology.

But the main contribution of Gandhi to India and the Indian masses has been through the powerful movements which he launched through the National Congress. Through nation-wide action he sought to mould the millions, and largely succeeded in doing so,

and changing them from a demoralized, timid, and hopeless mass, bullied and crushed by every dominant interest, and incapable of resistance, into a people with self-respect and self-reliance, resisting tyranny, and capable of united action and sacrifice for a larger cause. He made them think of political and economic issues, and every village and every bazaar hummed with argument and debate on the new ideas and hopes that filled the people. That was an amazing psychological change. The time was ripe for it, of course, and circumstances and world conditions worked for this change. But a great leader is necessary to take advantage of circumstances and conditions. Gandhi was that leader, and he released many of the bonds that imprisoned and disabled our minds, and none of us who experienced it can ever forget that great feeling of release and exhilaration that came over the Indian people. Gandhi has played a revolutionary role in India of the greatest importance because he knew how to make the most of the objective conditions and could reach the heart of the masses, while groups with a more advanced ideology functioned largely in the air because they did not fit in with those conditions and could therefore not evoke any substantial response from the masses.

To call Gandhi an ally of British imperialism is the veriest nonsense which can only evoke a smile—the answer to that charge can best be given by the

British Government and by British imperialists, who have all along considered him their most dangerous opponent. They have tried to suppress him and oppose him in every way, and the measure of their reaction to him and to the National Congress is the wide-flung and intensive repression that is going on in India.

It is perfectly true that Gandhi, functioning in the nationalist plane, does not think in terms of the conflict of classes, and tries to compose their differences. But the action he has indulged in and taught the people has inevitably raised mass consciousness tremendously and made social issues vital. And his insistence on the raising of the masses at the cost, wherever necessary, of vested interests has given a strong orientation to the national movement in favour of the masses.

Gandhi and the Congress must be judged by the policies they pursue and the action they indulge in. But behind this, personality counts and colours those policies and activities. In the case of a very exceptional person like Gandhi the question of personality becomes especially important in order to understand and appraise him. An English journalist, Mr. George Slocombe, who has had a wide experience of men prominent and otherwise in public affairs all over the world, has referred to Gandhi in a recent book of his, and the passage is interesting and worth quoting. He

says "I have never met any man more utterly honest, more transparently sincere, less given to egotism, self-conscious pride, opportunism, and ambition which are found in greater or less degree in all the other great political figures of the world." An English journalist's opinion need not carry much weight with us, nor does the sincerity of a person excuse a wrong policy or mistaken ideas. But as it happens, that opinion is shared by millions in India, and it is very superficial criticism to dispose of such a unique and outstanding personality by cheap and well-worn phrases which are applied indiscriminately to the average politician. We in India have often differed from Gandhi, we differ from him still in many ways, and sometimes we may follow different paths, but it has been the greatest privilege of our lives to work with him and under him for a great cause. To us he has represented the spirit and honour of India, the yearning of her sorrowing millions to be rid of their innumerable burdens, and an insult to him by the British Government or others has been an insult to India and her people ~

(1936)

\* From an article, published in 1936, written in reply to attacks on Gandhi which Shri Soumyendranath Tagore had recently published in France. Reproduced from *India and the World* (published by Messrs George Allen Unwin & Co Ltd), by courtesy of the author.

## HOW DOES GANDHIJI LIVE ?

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MAHADEV DESAI

I am not giving away any secrets when I begin this article with an anecdote connected with Gandhiji's last meeting with the Viceroy. When both the Viceroy and Gandhiji realised that there was, for the time being, no meeting ground between them, the Viceroy wondered if they should meet again. But if there was going to be no fresh approach, where was the good of each wasting the other's time? But would not the public be shocked at such an abrupt ending to the "negotiations"?

The Viceroy said he agreed that it would be a manly course to let the public know the naked reality rather than allow them to beguile themselves with false hopes. "Then when will you leave for Sevagram?" H. E. wondered.

"This evening, if I can. Of course I am at your disposal as long as you should need me. I can easily stay until the 13th," said Gandhiji. "But if there is no need, I should like to rush back to Sevagram at once. My heart is there. I have left a number of patients there. They are among the most valued of my co-workers, and I am happiest when with them."



Those who have not come in close touch with Gandhiji might well exclaim "What a queer thing this! No public man in the world has yet been known to talk in this fashion"

Quite right. But that is at once his strength and weakness. Nursing those who are ailing mentally and physically has been a passion with him throughout his life. But for his fundamental objection to vivisection, he might have been a physician and a surgeon

But though he chose law as his profession and then public life claimed the bulk of his time, the passion has remained and developed from what it once was—a hobby—to a sort of spiritual need

In one of his most intimate articles recently written in Gujarati, he wrote "I needed the solitude of Sevagram. It has been my experience that I can draw my inspiration only from my natural setting—the surroundings in which I live. Since the discovery of Satyagraha I have been fixing up my abode in what are called ashrams and pursuing my *sadhana* there. But Sevagram I have hesitated to call by the name of 'ashram.' I had originally thought of living and working there in solitude. But in spite of myself the place has developed into an ashram without any rules and regulations. It is growing, and new huts are springing up. Today it has become a hospital. In jest I have called it a 'Home for The Invalids.' I am physically and even mentally an invalid, and

I have collected about myself a crowd of invalids. I have even likened it to a Lunatic Asylum by no means an inappropriate comparison. Surely swaraj through the spinning wheel can be the proposition only of a lunatic. But luckily lunatics are unaware of their lunacy. And so I regard myself as sane "

Well, it is these ailing and the infirm and the so-called lunatics that give him his inspiration. When we are away from headquarters the letters to be placed on the top of the day's post must be from these. His most concentrated work, his most important talk or interview may be interrupted by anyone seeking his advice about the diet, bath and treatment of these patients. Curiously enough, everyone knows his weakness in the matter, and so only with one or two rare exceptions has the Working Committee met outside Wardha. The formal meetings have been held in Wardha, but the informal and more important ones have been held in the little mud hut where Gandhiji dwells, the smallest and yet the neatest little tenement in the Colony. It is there that men like Lord Lothian and Sir Stafford Cripps have had talks with him. There is no furniture but the Sevagram made palm-leaf mats spread on the floor, a stool being sometimes provided for those who cannot manage to sit cross-legged. Though the absence of furniture leaves enough floor-space, we are sometimes hard put to it when there are deputations of 10 to 15 people wanting to interview him. The walls are

decorated with palm trees in clay relief done by Miraben, for whom the hut was originally made, but whose gipsy blood will not allow her to stay in one hut for any length of time.

There are two classes of people, says Karel Capek; one class loves to collect odds and ends until their abode is littered with them, the other class will have as few things for themselves as they possibly can. Gandhiji combines in himself both the types, having the fewest possible needs and yet collecting all kinds of odds and ends. Even like his memory, which retains the essentials and rejects the unessentials, his odds and ends, which you find collected in the hut, have their uses for him, and the moment he needs a nail or a pin or some card-board or an envelope made by the hand from waste-paper, his finger unerringly falls on the proper place. But to turn to the mud-hut. Whatever the number of visitors and whatever the time, the little hut remains the scene of Gandhiji's activities. Instructions regarding the diet of the patients are final, in spite of their general treatment being in charge of Dr. Sushila Nayar. So the patients—among whom have been distinguished people like Shri Jairamdas Daulatram, Member of the Working Committee—have their meals served before Gandhiji, who looks into every little detail.

Within an hour after this the hut becomes office with the day's post and newspapers, and after he has

heard the main items or cast his eye over the post, it becomes his siesta-room, the time being utilised by his many helpers too for the same purpose ! Then writing or the giving of interviews begins, sometimes these taking place as he is lying on his back with a mud poultice on his abdomen. This is part of his permanent treatment for blood-pressure—not prescribed by any doctors but by himself. In the hot season a mud bandage on the head is an additional item, and to wondering visitors he often delights in describing the wonderful properties of mother earth. "That is why, instead of treading upon it, I have it on my head and on my abdomen." Then comes spinning, almost always being accompanied by the giving of interviews. But sometimes one finds him engrossed in examining the details of the latest model of Charkha and making suggestions to the designer. Perhaps very few people know that it was Gandhiji who, by numerous experiments in Yeravda Prison, perfected the portable spinning wheel which was originally designed by a Surat friend called Vimawala. It is therefore that the perfected wheel goes by the name of "Yeravda Charkha", even as the pact that was sealed with a fast in the same prison goes by the name of the Yearvda Pact.

But I have digressed. At five o'clock goes the bell for the final meal of the day, and the patients foregather in the hut, which has again become the dining room. Babu Rajendra Prasad who, with his

inseparable companion asthma, is always a patient, often turns up with tough questions on the day's business and stays to have his meal with the patients. The dinner over, the hut is deserted by the many occupants who go out for their evening constitutional. And after evening prayers the hut is converted, along with a little verandah attached to it, into a bed-room. The morning and the evening constitucionals are as much part of Gandhiji's regular routine as the prayers. Plenty of business is transacted during these walks—details about the kitchen, or the crops, or the latest born calf in the dairy being discussed with those in charge of them. Many of the workers in Wardha, in charge of the tannery or the Village Industries Association, do not ask for a separate time for themselves but simply walk out with Gandhiji to finish their business. Often enough interviews of a serious nature do take place on these walks ; but when there is no such interviewer, the day's fatigue is lightened by Gandhiji chatting away and amusing himself with tiny tots who accompany him. These little grandchildren are responsible for some of the most hilarious moments that Gandhiji has during the day.

“Bapuji,” asks the little grandson, “you are going to Delhi ?”

“Yes.”

“Why ?”

“ To see the Viceroy.”

“ But you always go to see the Viceroy. Why does not the Viceroy come to see you ?” And everyone has a hearty laugh.

Another grandson, who is just 16 months old, tugs at his stick every now and then, and laughs and makes everyone laugh when he gets no response from Gandhiji (who is silent) to his repeated “ Bapuji ”, “ Bapuji ”.

But I must say that these moments have become too few with ever increasing work. Press people seeking interviews at all hours of the day and the night run up from Nagpur with the latest statement of Lord Zetland or the latest pronouncement of Lord Linlithgow asking for Gandhiji's reaction. These are read out to him on the walk and the statement dictated on return or written out at odd moments during the day. As a matter of curiosity, I may mention here that the statement on Lord Zetland's latest interview on the Indian situation was written while Gandhiji was having a massage and a shave. The handwriting, none too legible normally, becomes during the triple operation the despair, not only of the poor typist but sometimes even of Gandhiji himself. Is it possible to do any work under these conditions, one wonders ? It is not only possible but it is being done. What makes it possible is Gandhiji's extraordinary capacity for concentration.

or his mental poise. Can a man, interesting himself equally in his patients and his cows, the latest complaint from a disgruntled inmate of the Ashram and the latest pronouncement from Simla or London, do justice to any of these? But even a carping critic would certify that Gandhiji does justice to all these and a multitude more of items, grave or gay, important or unimportant. For nothing that he has to deal with is too trivial for him. Everything that comes whether from the highest or from the lowliest, from the wisest or from the most unsophisticated, has for him the same sacredness that is due to it from one who above everything else calls himself a votary of truth. For the truth often lies hidden in untruth, even as God lies hidden even in things evil. It is this philosophy of life that lends purpose and reality to everything that he takes up or deals with, and it is his infinite faith in God that gives him the patience of job and his unfailing good humour. That is why he can suffer fools gladly whilst leaders of men like Pandit Motilal or Das could not, and Jawaharlal or Sardar cannot.

One of us went to him on Independence Day and presented him with a number of conundrums on the Pledge. "What would you advise me to do? And why should you have framed a pledge capable of so many interpretations?" "Don't you know," replied Gandhiji with a smile, "the Vedas are capable of innumerable interpretations? our Pledge is like the

Vedas. If you have the intelligence and the courage to interpret it, take the pledge; if not, don't take it "

One of the things that he invariably reads—and often the only thing he has time for—in the *Times of India* is the 'Thought for the Day' on top of the leading article. There was one some time ago that he has consciously practised throughout his life, inasmuch as it is an aspect of non-violence, and it now adorns one of the walls facing his seat. "When you are in the right, you can afford to keep your temper," reads the text, and "when you are in the wrong, you cannot afford to lose it." Objectively he would read the motto with a slight alteration. "When your opponent is in the wrong, you can afford to keep your temper, and when your opponent is in the right, you cannot afford to lose it." That is why an irritating statement by a high dignitary or a grotesque speech by a public man fails to irritate or ruffle him. Tulsidas' *Ramayana* is an eternal source of inspiration for him and occupies the same place in his prayers as the *Bhagawad Gita*. A text that is often on his lips may well be said to be his motto, a free translation of which is: "All things—with or without life—the Lord has created with them good and bad points. The good, like the discerning swan, separate the good milk and reject the adulterated water." "There's a soul of good in things evil if men observingly distil it out," sang Shakespeare. But what Tulsidas has said has a charm all its own.



I shall permit myself to cite a few more anecdotes in this connection.

"The papers say," said Sardar Vallabhbhai one day to him, "that Lord Linlithgow sent an advance copy of his speech to you. Was it for suggestions or alterations?"

"It is a delicious lie which needs no suggestions or alterations, but a summary rejection."

"But," said the Sardar, laughing, "you have a knack of pleasing all gods. In the very article where you have a good word to say for the Viceroy's speech, you have something nice to say for Jayaprakash and the Socialists too!"

"Oh, yes," says Gandhiji joining the laughter, "that was what my mother taught me. She would ask me to go to the Haveli, and also to the Shiva Temple, and you may be interested to hear that when we were married we were taken to worship not only to all the Hindu shrines but to a Fakir's shrine as well!"

An American press correspondent came one afternoon to interview him. Just as he was about to be called in, someone came running through the fields to inform him that Shri Aryanayakam's little boy was passing away. Half an hour ago the bright little boy was playing about with other youngsters, and we could not believe this news. Gandhiji rushed across the

fields and sat consoling the mother whilst the boy was in a swoon, from which he was never to recover. He, however, remembered to ask me to request the American visitor to wait until he could return. The boy, as we found the next day, had swallowed a bottleful of sugarcoated quinine pills mistaking them for sweets and poisoned himself. Everyone was in a state of great agitation, but as soon as Gandhiji found that all was over he returned and called the American interviewer in. He had no particular question to ask, but asked generally about the world situation.

"I am like a frog in the well," immediately came the reply, "and the whole of the universe for me is contained in India and in Sevagram. I do not study world affairs as some of my colleagues do."

Next question : "Will there be any news during the next six months ?"

"There won't be any fireworks," said Gandhiji, instinctively reading the American friend's meaning behind the question. "The pressure we may have to put will be the gentlest. What we do non-violently in India can't produce one-tenth so much sensation as the violent doing in the West can. And you must not forget that for us the charka is the only instrument of war."

"But won't there be any trouble ?" asked the

friend, almost regretting that the prospect would be too dull, for the press people at any rate, without it.

"Well," said Gandhiji, "if the British officials want trouble, they can always get it. That is to say, if they goad us, there may be trouble. But I do not think they want it. And I at any rate am not aching for a fight."

"And now, Sir, how is your health?"

Promptly came the answer: "Middling like this pencil!" and he held out his pencil to show the word 'middling' printed on it!

The interviewer saw that Gandhiji could laugh and make him laugh while the sudden passing away of the boy had filled the atmosphere with gloom.

But often enough he shuts himself up in the shell of his silence to escape not only these visitors but the disturbing factors about him. That is his most reliable form of escape from the things that jar and worry and annoy. And often during these days of travail he has observed perpetual silence, breaking it only for the patients or for pressing interviews. It is not only a never-failing way of escape, it is an unfailing source of inspiration. "I feel life more in tune with the Infinite when I am silent, though I agree that we should always be in tune with it, whether we are silent or speaking, whether we are in the solitude or in a

bustling crowd." He said once to a friend who wanted to know the secret of silence "I started it originally in order to have a silent day of undisturbed work. When I want to do concentrated work, I do often take silence even when it is not a Monday. But though I began it for material ends, it has become a great spiritual aid, and during my moments of uninterrupted silence for days, I feel the presence of God more and more."

As I have already indicated, Sevagram was originally intended to be a solitary home. Gandhiji did not want anyone to accompany him, not even Kasturba (Mrs. Gandhi) When Dr John Mott interviewed him in 1937, he did so in the only hut then on the premises, and that one-room hut was occupied by five or six people who had gathered there for village work But workers from far and near began to gravitate here, and he had not the heart to say 'no'.

He had no idea whatsoever of having a dispensary on the premises He himself in the early days used to prescribe fasting or semi-fasting, and castor oil, sodium bicarbonate, quinine and iodine were the only drugs he used for those who came with their troubles But the number began to grow larger every day, and with the coming of a doctor we had a little bit of a dispensary. Thanks to Shrimati Shushila Nayar, whilst cholera was raging in the surrounding villages Sevagram escaped

with only three deaths. Dr. Sushila gave some 400 injections and treated several cases successfully. In spite of our emphasis on prevention, there is no escaping the fact that one discovers almost immediately one gets in touch with villagers that there is a woeful lack of medical aid in these villages. Though the bulk of the cases are malaria, there are every now and then emergency cases which need immediate attention, and none is available. However much we may idealise the villages, there is as much moral rot in the villages as in towns. The difference is that many townspeople get treatment; in villages the disease is not even diagnosed. A woman came the other day walking several miles from another village. She had been having fever for several days, and it looked like enteric. A place was improvised for her, and she began receiving treatment. It was soon discovered that she had a fell sexual disease besides, and she did not know it. The wretched husband, who is a factory hand in the town, had given it to her. She received careful treatment and was discharged cured. A boy who had peritonitis would have died had not Dr. Sushila rushed him immediately to the Civil Hospital in Wardha and had him operated on. And that is how we have now a fair-sized dispensary, and we may soon have to have a hospital.

With the introduction of the Wardha Scheme of Education the Aryanayakams who were in Wardha were attracted to Sevagram and started the experiment

in its proper environment. With the growing population and the milk needs of the patients came into being the dairy with someone to take charge of it. All the milk, butter and other milk products needed for the colony are produced on the premises, and so too the vegetables and part of the cereals. That necessarily means a herd of cattle, not to mention the goats.

So it is the Sannyasi's story over again. The Sannyasi had a cat, a cow was needed to give it milk, then someone to take care of the cow, and so on. And I have little doubt that, even if Gandhiji were to retire to the Himalayas, the Sannyasi's story would be repeated there in all its vivid detail.

But how did the "menagerie", the name which Sardar Vallabhbhai often gives to the Ashram, come into being? In a word, I can say that it has sprung out of Gandhiji's loyalty to his co-workers and his weakness for birds of the same feather. However radical he may be, he is conservative in his tastes and attachment to friends and co-workers. Old co-workers gravitate towards him, and he gravitates towards them!

At the head of the queer crowd is Bhansali, as unlike the rest as anything could be. Once a professor in the Gujarat Vidyapith, and then a jail-bird, he ultimately turned recluse, went to the length of fasting for weeks, and ultimately betook himself to the forest, where he wandered for years without

a shred of cloth on him. He took a vow of silence for several years, sewed up his lips with a copper string, and lived on raw wheat flour and neem leaves. Once during his wanderings he stumbled upon Gandhiji and stayed. Gandhiji gently nursed him back to ordinary life, and the man who questioned the necessity for work, and hated it as a kind of bondage, now puts in about 17 hours of it every day. He cards his cotton, spins for eight to ten hours, and teaches for seven hours. He not only speaks now but fills the Ashram and its neighbourhood with roars of laughter. He is now civilised to the extent of wrapping a piece of cloth round his waist, but has no weakness for the belongings to which ordinary human beings are slaves. In a place infested with scorpions and poisonous snakes he moves about without a lantern and without shoes, believing that these creatures of God are no less his brothers than the human beings among whom he lives. He often harks back to his life of fiery penance and comes in with requests to Gandhiji for permission to hang down a well head-over-heels! But, thank God, he accepts Gandhiji's discipline.

There is among us a Japanese sadhu (monk) who works like a horse and lives like a hermit, doing all the hard chores of the Ashram and going about merrily beating his drum early every morning and evening, filling the air with his chanting of *om namyo hom rengo kyom*. He is of course, frankly pro-Japanese and

believes that Japan is out to serve and civilise China. But I do not believe there is an iota of truth in the charge some people have levelled at him of being a Government spy. If he is a spy, spies must be most amiable specimens of humanity, and I should like to be one. To my mind he lives up to the gospel of *Ahimsa* better than any one of us, not excluding Gandhiji.

Among the patients there is a leper. He was a political jail-bird with us in Yeravda and got leprosy there, or had it diagnosed there, I forget which. He is a profound Sanskrit scholar and talks with you in Sanskrit, making you feel as though it was as easy as your mother tongue. After having wandered for years as a castaway, having even gone on an indefinite fast out of loathing for the fell disease which is now in a considerably advanced stage, he rolled in here one fine morning, saying he wanted to lay his bones here, that he knew he would have shelter here and would not go even if he was turned out. "How can I say no to you?" said Gandhiji. "If I harbour a son-in-law suffering from tuberculosis, why should I not harbour you? There is Ba to look after him. Of Valji Desai everyone is fond, and I am sure he would be taken care of. But who will look after you if I don't? I shall build you a hut right near my hut, and you make the place your abode. Even if no one remains here, you at least shall stay."



An addition to this mosaic is Maurice Friedman, a mechanical genius whose restless spirit has now brought him here. He belongs to the nation which is reduced to ashes by Germany and has in him the fire that is hidden under the cinders. He might have made a pile in Mysore as an engineer, but he came under the influence of Raman Maharshi, became a Sannyasi—Bharatanand is his new name—worked in Aundh, and has now come here. His inventive genius is ever active, and why should not be? President Moscicki of Poland had scores of inventions to his credit, and so may have Bharatanand—in a way more unique than others, for he swears by the gospel of a handicraft civilisation based on non-violence.

There are many others whom I would fain mention, but these specimens should suffice. There is always a floating population, and like Gandhiji's own hut Kasturba's hut too has the elasticity of accommodating as many as may be necessary. Women guests she has to take in, but sometimes she has inconvenient guests too.

When those "Satyagrahis" from the Scheduled Class came in order to fast against some fancied grievances of their community, Gandhiji placed the whole Ashram at their disposal and thus stole their thunder.

"You select the place where you will stay. I will

vacate this hut for you if you like," he said to them And they selected part of Kasturba's hut and her verandah

"But where shall I stay?" She asked, smiling

"Well, you do not need much room, and you know that I offered them my room?"

"You did that because they are your children!" She said

"But are they not equally yours?" said Gandhiji, and she capitulated She sleeps and spins and rests in that little hut often with as many as half a dozen guests

"Quite a motley crowd that" Someone will exclaim They have not only their idiosyncrasies, but their angularities and weaknesses too But their love for Gandhiji and his work is a common bond that binds them And with a will and cheer they cook their own food, wash their own clothes, clean their own latrines, and so on In their midst Gandhiji lives and works, beginning his day at three o'clock in the morning, never missing his prayers or spinning, more regular than anyone else, and turning out more work than most public men I know, though he describes himself as physically and mentally an invalid

With its mud and bamboo houses built without much of a plan, without any guest house, and without

anything like the art that lends charm to many other institutions, the Sevagram Ashram still attracts the attention of numerous visitors and even workers. There must be something indefinably attractive not only about Gandhiji but about the crowd itself! Or else why should one like Rajkumari Amrit Kaur choose to cast in her lot with it? And why should I madly scribble such a lot about it?

But what about the work for which Gandhiji made the irrevocable decision to come and settle down in a village which was chosen because it was the most difficult to tackle? Has he been able to do it justice? Is the village changed for the better after three and a half years of Gandhiji's stay? I confess, the answer cannot be given in a resounding affirmative. All we have been able to do is to give a fair number of people employment on a meagre wage, we have given a fairly bad blow to untouchability, we have introduced a few spinning wheels in the village and interested the children in our work and the basic system of education, and we have given medical aid to many of them. But there is a hiatus between the villagers and us. There is yet no living link between us. We have our morning and evening prayers, but they touch not these simple folks. May be we have, with the best wishes in the world, not succeeded in coming down to their level and becoming one with them. Like basic education the passion to revive the village has come rather late in Gandhiji's

life, when he has preoccupations which leave him time and energy to tackle the live problems of the village as he would like to do. And not the least handicap is the gathering about him of people like the present writer, each good in his or her own way, but not fit enough to bear or even to share the burdens he has taken upon himself. Our consolation is that there are hundreds of others in the country who are fitter instruments, and whether the work in Sevagram goes on or not, elsewhere it will go on.

Besides, the Sevagram is but an experiment in truth and non-violence. He has collected so many men and women of vastly dissimilar temperaments, some with little literary education, some having nothing more than that education, and also of different creeds. It gives him enough exercise in the practice of *Ahimsa* in the domestic field, and its successful practice would mean its automatic extension to the political field. That is why he always longs to get back to his laboratory in order to be free for more self-examination and more experimentation. That difficult instruments make his immediate task more difficult is true, but it is also true that they make him all the fitter for the larger task.\*

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## LAST DAYS IN THE AGA KHAN PALACE

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PYARELAL

For days and nights before the 6th of May last year, (1944) the air had been thick with rumours about Gandhiji's removal from the Aga Khan Palace. The Inspector-General of Prisons when he visited Gandhiji in the morning of the 5th of May was rather reticent and mysterious. He casually asked if in the opinion of the doctors Gandhiji was fit to undertake a hundred miles journey by car or train, but would give no further information. Gandhiji had repeatedly requested the Government to remove him from the Aga Khan Palace. The idea that he was responsible for the heavy expenditure of renting that big, though as rightly termed by *Time*, shabby bungalow, with a huge guard round about hurt him deeply. "It is not their money they are spending", he exclaimed in anguish "The money belongs to me—to the poor masses of India. It is criminal to spend it like this when millions are dying of starvation. And why do they want a huge guard? They know I won't run away." According to the newspaper reports friends had been agitating for his removal from that place, because of its associations with the deaths of two dear ones. Then there was the question of the place being highly malarious, and this

was exercising the minds of the jail authorities. We all felt that a transfer was imminent. The atmosphere was tense. Would they remove him to an ordinary prison? Would they break up our party? Would Bapu's health be able to stand the strain of such changes? These were questions that tortured everybody in the Aga Khan Palace except Bapu. He was worried about one thing only. He must cease to cost the nation so heavily. As for the questions of release it did not enter our imagination at all. We were all convinced that the Government would never release him on health grounds.

At about 5 o'clock in the evening we were told to relieve the batch of convicts, who everyday came to work for us from Yerawada Prison, early soon after their departure the I. G. P. followed by the Superintendent of the Camp walked into Gandhiji's room. After enquiring about his health the I. G. P. told him that Gandhiji and the whole party were to be released unconditionally at 8 a. m. the next morning. Gandhiji was taken aback. "Are you joking?" he asked. "No, I am serious", replied the I. G. P. "You can continue to stay here for some time for convalescence if you like. The guard will be removed at 8 a. m. to-morrow and then your friends can visit you freely. Or you can go to your friend's place in Poona or to Bombay. Personally, I would not advise you to stay here. This is a military area and when crowds begin coming for

*darshan*, etc, there might be a clash which you won't like." Gandhiji had overcome the first shock by this time. He smiled and retorted in good humour—humour which he has always retained through thick and thin, "What about my railway fare if I stay in Poona for some time?" "You will have it whenever you leave Poona", replied the I. G. P. "All right, then I will stay in Poona for two-three days"

The Superintendent and the I. G. P. were the happiest men on earth that day to feel the burden of the heaviest responsibility off their shoulders

The I. G. P. left soon after and the rest of us went to have our evening meal which was early—between 6 and 7 p.m. at the detention camp. When I returned I found Bapu immersed in deep thoughts. He looked unhappy. Illness in prison he had regarded almost as a sin and he was disconsolate at the thought of release on health grounds. Once he just said, 'Is it really on health grounds that they are releasing me?' But he immediately collected himself and remarked, "Well, it is only right for me to take their word at its face value"

We had made preparations for a seven years' stay in prison. Gandhiji had often told us that he did not expect to be released till some time after the end of the war. There were no prospects of the war coming to an end in the near future and so he had come to

the conclusion that we would be staying in prison for seven years out of which we had completed nearly twenty-one months. So we had to pack up all that we had collected there for our long stay. Packing of books and papers and medicine bottles was the most taxing, the latter having accumulated during Ba's illness. Gandhiji's orders were that everything was to be ready before 8 a.m. "I won't give you a single minute after eight", he told us. While we spent practically the whole night in packing, Gandhiji lay awake in bed immersed in deep thought. Every eye was turned on him. The country expected so much from him. How could he fulfil those expectations when he was going out on health grounds?

The morning prayers were held at 5 a.m. and everybody attended the prayers after a bath. After that Gandhiji drafted his last letter to the Government from the prison requesting them to acquire for him the plot where Ba and Mahadevbhai has been cremated. "That land has become consecrated and according to custom cannot be put to any other purpose," he said.

We paid our last visit to the Samadhi as prisoners. There lay the two dear ones. I had been feeling that if only the release had come three months ago we could have taken Ba with us. Suddenly it struck me that Ba was after all a mother. She must have felt she could not leave Mahadev all alone for all time to come.



and so decided to stay with him. We placed our floral offerings there and after the usual prayers returned to the house. The barbed wire gate closed behind us, and the sentry took his usual place. It was only 7-30. They were to guard us till 8 a. m.

At 7-45 a. m. the I G P. came. Gandhiji took up his stick to walk out. "No, Mahatmaji, wait a few minutes" he said. We all waited in the verandah. At the stroke of eight the I. G. P. led the way. He took Gandhiji and Dr. Sushila in his own car, the rest of the party followed in another one, and we passed out of the barbed wire exactly after spending 90 weeks in that place. The District Commissioner and the Police Commissioner had come to see us off. As the Inspector-General of Police's car crossed the barbed wire the Police Officer stopped it and I learnt later that it was to serve on Dr Sushila a notice prohibiting her from communicating to any one the happenings inside the Aga Khan Palace during the period of detention. Gandhiji asked her to sign it. "Why, is not there one for me?", he had remarked. There was none. The authorities were afraid that he would refuse to go out if they served him with anything of that sort. The rest of the party coming after were also served with similar notices. They hesitated to sign them till some one reasoned out that after all to sign was not to accept the restrictions imposed. Gandhiji had not attached any importance to the prohibitory order. "The order

is written in such wide and vague terms that they cannot seriously expect any one to obey it We shall find out what it means" With these words he later asked Dr Gilder to get it defined by the Home Department of the Government of Bombay

As the car drove up to Parnakuti, Gandhiji became very pensive. He was thinking of Ba It was she who had been so keen to get out of jail. She did get out of it before us, but that was not what she had longed for "Yet I know she could not have had a better death," he murmured "Both Ba and Mahadev laid down their lives at the alter of the goddess of freedom And they have become immortal Would they have attained that glory if they had died outside prison ?"\*

5

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